
The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with vibrant orange, yellow, and red clouds. Below the sky, a dark, silhouetted mountain range stretches across the horizon. In the foreground, a body of water reflects the warm colors of the sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

In Search of Simplicity

A True Story that Changes Lives

John P. Haines



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Praise for *In Search of Simplicity*

"Like an innocent child, John Haines lures us to join him in awesome wonder at life's beauty, magic and mystery. His enlightened temperament oozes on every page into a simple philosophy that life has good, everywhere."

Roselyn DeGaris, Adelaide, Australia

"As you read the many colorful accounts of John Haines' true story you find that he has all the color and verve and life experience of an Indiana Jones."

Elan Sun Star, Photographer-Writer-Teacher, Hawaii
www.sunstarphoto.com

"As modern society takes us further away from simple living, the message in this book brings us back to what matters most, by reminding us that 'simplicity' is available at any time when we are prepared to open our hearts and minds and engage fully with the world around us. In this way, being present to each moment reconnects us with the preciousness of life."

Suzanne Stewart, Buddhist practitioner, Wellington

"...interesting, captivating and thought provoking ...a great read and a great author. You won't and can't put it down!"

Jenny Hamberger, New Zealand

1. Introduction

The first part of the paper is devoted to a general discussion of the problem. It is shown that the problem is of great importance in the theory of differential equations and in the theory of the calculus of variations. The second part of the paper is devoted to a detailed study of the problem. It is shown that the problem is of great importance in the theory of differential equations and in the theory of the calculus of variations.

2. The problem of the calculus of variations

The problem of the calculus of variations is a problem of great importance in the theory of differential equations and in the theory of the calculus of variations. It is shown that the problem is of great importance in the theory of differential equations and in the theory of the calculus of variations.

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5. The problem of the calculus of variations

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For my father, Jim Haines, who showed me and many others what true selfless love and service is, right to the very end. What a great man.

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For Asha, our youngest—thanks for putting up with your father's occasional (I hope) grumpiness throughout this prolonged process of writing. And thanks for your support and artistic advice on that landmark day when I/we discovered the right formula for the cover.

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A True Story that Changes Lives

John P. Haines

coincidence n. *Notable concurrence of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection.*

A man traveled the world in search of Divine Knowledge, in search of the Truth. He visited many countries and consulted with many wise beings and teachers. And although he gained great insight and wisdom, he hadn't yet found that which he sought, that which would free him from suffering and from the wheel of birth, death and rebirth. Finally he arrived in a lush land of ancient mystery. He was tired.

I've done enough searching, *he thought*. It is time for a rest. This looks as good a place as any. So he sat in the shade of a huge wizened tree, a tree seemingly almost as old as the land itself. He rested his aching back against the trunk of that gigantic denizen of the forest and looked out upon a sun dappled glade of emerald grass and wildflowers.

This is a good place to stop, *he thought*, wiping his brow with the sleeve of his travel-faded tunic. But wouldn't it be nice to have some fresh water?

A crystalline brook complete with moss covered rocks instantly appeared, meandering lazily through the glade.

Wow, *thought the traveler*. My thirst will be quenched, but not my hunger. Wouldn't it be nice to have something to eat?

Amazingly, a table appeared beside the stream, laden with the freshest and most exquisite food imaginable, a veritable feast.

Now, this is incredible! What better place to rest my travel weary bones and regenerate my body and soul. The only thing I need now would be some shelter in which to rest.

And then, in less than the blink of an eye, a charming log cabin appeared by the stream and the table.

What an idyllic dwelling in an idyllic setting. Surely this is Heaven on Earth, *thought the traveler*, scarcely believing his eyes. He rested against that tree in bliss, all the stress of the years of searching melting away. He got up and washed his hands and face in the cool and pristine water of the stream. He cupped his hands in the water and drank deeply, his thirst quenched. He sat at the table in the shade of that magnificent tree and ate his fill of the most delicious fruits and vegetables he had ever tasted.

I could stay here forever, if only there was someone to share it with, *he mused*.

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The door of the cabin opened, and out walked the most beautiful young woman the traveler had ever beheld. She smiled and beckoned him to her.

It seems that when I'm under this tree everything I wish for instantly manifests. I wonder what would happen if I wished for a fire breathing monster?

A huge and horrific scaly, fire-breathing creature instantly appeared, blotting out the sun completely with its swaying bulk. The man cowered behind the tree trunk.

Terrified, he wondered, What if it ate me?

And it did.



1

*I love all waste
And solitary places, where we taste
The pleasures of believing what we see
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be.*

P.B. Shelley 1792 – 1822

A Kingdom in the Desert

Toronto, Late December, 1983.

“Excuse me, Sir. It would appear that we’ve overbooked in the economy section,” stated the immaculately dressed Swiss Air Representative at Toronto’s Pearson International Airport. “Would you like to fly First Class?”

“Certainly,” I responded, pleasantly nonplussed. It wasn’t everyday one was bumped from Economy to First Class. I wasn’t about to turn that opportunity down. It was an auspicious beginning to my Saudi Arabian adventure. I settled into my oversized and luxurious seat for my flight to Zurich.

I had signed on for a two year contract with Bell Canada International and had attended a two day orientation seminar in Toronto. The principal message from this seminar was that I was about to be rubbing shoulders with a culture that was diametrically contrasted to my own. A successful, satisfying time in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (called KSA) would be dependent, to a large extent, on my own choices. I could isolate

myself from this new world I was entering or I could embrace a host of fresh possibilities that this opportunity presented.

Bell Canada International was an advisory subsidiary of the parent company Bell Canada, which had employed me as a manager for the past three-and-a-half years. Bell Canada was a huge organization with over 100,000 employees running the telephone systems of Canada's two most populous provinces, Ontario and Quebec. I had thoroughly enjoyed my time with this gentle giant of a company. I had held a series of junior management positions, all in the area of customer service. The company's fundamental philosophy was to extend an exceptional level of service to our customers. No matter what happened, we took the stance that the customer was always right. This had been a great learning opportunity for me. Despite its sometimes cumbersome magnitude, I always considered Bell Canada to be an excellent employer.

For weeks I had endured a series of vaccinations, including Gamma Globulin injections to my backside that temporarily made sitting a tender affair. Thus protected from the multifarious diseases I could be exposed to in this less than fastidiously hygienic land and armed with a newly purchased hot weather wardrobe, sunglasses, a Saudi language course and world map lent by my Uncle Dick (who had already completed two tours in KSA) and encouraging words from colleagues who had recently returned from the Kingdom, I enthusiastically awaited my new assignment.

Refreshed by a good sleep in a Swiss hotel and stimulated by a special exhibit of Leonardo da Vinci sketches in a Zurich museum, I embarked on the direct flight to Jeddah.

The tweed blazer, that had partly warded off the winter chill while strolling along Zurich's famous Bahnhofstrasse, home of banks and up market retailers, was clearly unnecessary as I immediately began to sweat in Jeddah's modern international airport.

I had been warned that even a picture of a woman's shoulder might not escape the censor's black felt tipped marker. Still, it was a somewhat tedious and shocking journey through customs as every article of every passenger was checked and rechecked.

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Finally, I was met by a Bell Canada International (BCI) representative and whisked off through Jeddah's chaotic streets to the Canadian Compound and headquarters for the western portion of BCI's operations in Saudi Arabia. It was a Thursday morning.

For the duration of my two years in the Kingdom, weekends were one-and-a-half day affairs that began at noon on Thursdays. Mosques were full of worshippers for the Friday midday prayers, equivalent to a Sunday church visit for Christians. It took some getting used to the fact that Saturday was the first day of the work week.

This Thursday morning I met with the top Canadian manager for the Western Region of BCI. He was a tall, slim, youthful man who originally hailed from London, Ontario. He had already lived for a number of years in Jeddah, which was perhaps partly responsible for his relaxed appearance. He welcomed me warmly and discussed my upcoming assignment outside of Medina, a three hour drive or a half hour flight to the north. I was to be an advisor in the Repair Service Center there. He explained that I would remain in Jeddah for a few days in order to sort out initial formalities, not the least of which was to procure a Saudi driver's license.

A junior manager drove me to an office in another part of Jeddah where I surrendered my passport, to be safeguarded by my company, and was issued with an iqama (identity booklet and residence permit) that I was to carry at all times. Sans passport I couldn't just hop on a plane, should I grow dissatisfied with my experience. It was explained to me that my passport would be returned to me a day before each outward journey. There was no turning back now.

By now it was midday, so we returned to the compound for the weekend. I was shown to a simple but clean and modern room in the singles apartment block. This housed all single status employees who worked in Jeddah, plus temporary visitors like me. Single status employees were those of us who were unmarried or who had left their spouse or partner in their home country.

A couple of young single Canadian men, Peter and Scott, were avid scuba divers. Between them they had an extra mask, snorkel and flippers, so they offered to take me snorkeling. They told me that all the reefs closer to the city had been damaged by the

activity of people, so we would have to go further up the coast. I gladly accepted their offer and we were soon racing out of town to reach an area they regarded as excellent for snorkeling. I use the term 'racing' quite literally. Outside the cities the speed limit was 120 km/h, but this was rarely policed and almost as rarely adhered to. The roads were generally very straight on the mostly flat coastal plain with little traffic and excellent visibility. Many drivers regularly cruised at between 120 and 160 km/h.

The landscape fascinated me. This desert wasn't rolling dunes as I had envisioned. Instead it was a mostly barren red and beige rock strewn terrain with a meager assortment of drought resistant vegetation. A few squat, spreading trees had tiny clusters of pea-like leaves. I was told these trees were a type of acacia. I saw no wildlife unless you want to include the ubiquitous and pesky fly. Presumably most animals would be nocturnal in order to escape the extremely hot daytime temperatures. Here, at the coast, it was extremely humid. One step outside of an air conditioned room or car resulted in instant perspiration

Before long we turned off the pavement and the two-wheel-drive Toyota bounced over the rock hard surface at significant speed. Time and again over the next two years I was to see town cars propelled cross country in order to reach choice snorkeling and diving locations. Of course, one of the results of these off road forays was that flat tires were common. When a puncture did occur a team would jump from the car to change the flat with the efficiency and speed rivaling a Formula One pit crew.

At first glance the Red Sea is nothing spectacular, its homely surface hardly betraying the stunning underwater scenery awaiting the intrepid swimmer. With relatively constant warm water temperatures year round, fringe reefs clothe the entire length of the coastline, making this one of the great dive destinations in the world. Some say the Red Sea rivals the Great Barrier Reef for diversity of underwater life. The marine life around the reefs is exceptional, including reef sharks, many species of rays, the Hawksbill Turtle and a dazzling array of weird and wonderful fish with descriptive names like Arabian Angelfish, Lionfish, Bearded Scorpion fish and Ghost Pipefish.

The tide was low so Peter, Scott and I waded out to the reef wearing swim trunks, T shirts and running shoes.

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“Try not to step on the stingrays,” explained Peter as one of these silver winged creatures surged in front of him, disturbed out of its half-buried resting location under the sand above the reef. I could see why it was advisable to wear shoes. The coral was sharp and it was inhabited by a number of durable and daring denizens which had developed protective spines and various stinging apparatuses. Right then I adopted a policy I was to adhere to during countless future forays to the sea: ‘Look but don’t touch.’ This policy was to serve me well.

The boys showed me how to spit onto the inner glass surface of the mask to prevent fogging. Then, with flippers tightly secured to our still-shod feet, we were off, kicking gently and swimming along the outer edge of the reef that averaged only a foot or two below the water surface.

What a world that was! I never imagined there could be so many colors in the sea. The corals alone were like living pulsating rainbows, some pink and some aquamarine, some black, and every conceivable color in between. These weren’t the dead spiny souvenir shop coral pieces gathering dust as display shelf ornaments; these were alive with palpitating polyps and an expanding and ever evolving skeletal structure capable of supporting a multitude of beautiful and sometimes bizarre creatures.

Peter pointed at the head of a moray eel peaking out at us from its dark coral cavern. I paused to watch iridescent striped clown fish flitting within the waving tentacles of sea anemones. I reflected on the symbiotic intelligence of a nature that allowed these little fish to remain immune to the anemone’s sting, and yet by their very presence lured other unsuspecting creatures into its host’s ring of tentacles.

Huge human-sized groupers languidly cruised along the sub surface, a striking contrast to flashing schools of multicolored fish, numberless but surely in the thousands. Amazingly, none of these marine creatures were afraid of us. With our masks and flippers we benign mammalian fish were welcomed, unchallenged, to this submarine world.

I had grown up observing, respecting and loving the terrestrial landscape of North America. But nothing in my formative years had prepared me for the dizzying diversity of life in this Middle

Eastern seascape. It was simply astounding. It gripped me. I knew where I would spend every possible weekend in the next two years.

After a couple of hours of this relaxing activity, an aqueous equivalent to a meandering stroll through a primeval tropical rainforest, we headed back to shore.

“What did you think of that, John?” asked Scott.

“Amazing!” was the only response I could muster, but I’m sure the immensely satisfied expression on my face spoke more clearly than did my brief reply.

“Would you like to purchase your own mask and flippers?” Scott asked.

“You bet,” I replied.

“We’ll take you to a good shop before you leave Jeddah,” added Peter.

“Great,” I affirmed. I knew I was going to love it here.

The singles compound in Jeddah was my home for these first days. Peter and Scott showed me their activity room and the well equipped gym with posters of steroidal half-naked muscle men adorning the walls. We joined some other ‘singles’ to watch a video one evening. Peter and Scott took me to a dive shop. While their scuba tanks were being filled, they helped me to choose the equipment I would need to get started with snorkeling.

Since I was due to get my driver’s license the next day, they filled me in on some of the rules of the road. I was glad to hear there were some rules because it appeared to me, as a fresh newcomer to the streets of Jeddah, that traffic here took on the form of a free-for-all, a sort of anarchy of conveyance, not far removed from bumper cars at a fair.

Driving in Saudi Arabia is on the right hand side and right hand turns are allowed on most red lights, provided the way is clear. But in Jeddah right hand turns were made from any lane, including the third lane from the right. A red light didn’t seem to mean stop. Its meaning, for many drivers, was more like a multiple choice real life and death exam question:

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1. Slow down if you like.
2. Change lanes in the intersection and zoom past other traffic.
3. Stop soon if you are still more than five seconds from the intersection.
4. Some combination of the above at the discretion of the driver.

On extremely busy six lane streets in the city cars overtook on all sides, including via the emergency stopping lane.

“Scott, is driving this bad everywhere in the Kingdom?” I asked as an impatient driver leaned on his horn, wanting desperately to pass. Scott calmly changed lanes to allow the young fist-waving Saudi man through before replying, “Jeddah is unique. Residents of the city come from some seventy countries. I’m sure some of them never drove before coming to Saudi Arabia. It would seem that some must have got their licenses out of a box of Cracker Jack. There is an old joke that says, ‘Just getting out of Jeddah is as dangerous as pointing a camera at the US Consulate.’”

Settling back in my seat I was glad I wasn’t driving. It wasn’t time yet for me to get out of Jeddah.

The next day I joined two other Canadian newcomers for the trip into town to get our Saudi driver’s licenses. We were escorted by another ex-patriot, Bob, who was experienced in these matters.

“Stay calm,” he cautioned us as we entered the drive of the Jeddah Central Police Station. “Just getting a license can be a pretty unpredictable affair. The rules are constantly changing.” How prophetic his words proved to be.

We shuffled forward on the asphalt in the morning sun, in a long line slowly approaching a bored-looking official methodically filling in forms. He had a permanently surly look, as though he had been ordered unexpectedly back to work in the middle of his annual vacation. *And being Saturday, this was like a Monday*, I thought. *I’d hate to have to deal with this guy at the end of the week.* Two hours of shuffling later it was our turn.

“I bet he goes for coffee now,” said Bill, a dark haired chap of about thirty who had been on the orientation course with me in

Toronto. Sure enough, as we stepped up to the counter, the clerk mumbled something unintelligible under his breath, and left.

"At least it's not hot like in the summer," murmured our guide.

"Small blessing," said Bill, sarcastically.

Fifteen minutes later our official returned and snarled at us, "Driver's licenses." We handed over our Canadian driver's licenses and our surly friend began filling in forms. In fairness to this man, he had to translate everything from English into Arabic. He compared each of us to the photos on our licenses.

"Chest X-Ray," he requested, with the hint of a smirk turning up the corners of his mouth.

"Chest X-Ray?" responded Bob, incredulously. "For a driver's license?"

The clerk carefully laid down his pen on the countertop, now looking bored as he motioned for the Pakistani men waiting behind us to advance to the counter.

"Where?" stammered Bob, forced to respond quickly after the somnolent morning.

"Hospital," replied our interrogator eventually. He seemed reluctant to tear himself away from the next group of customers, who were anxious to get some assistance after close to three hours of waiting.

As we walked back to the car Bob turned to us and said, "See what I mean about the rules changing all the time?"

"We certainly do," we exclaimed as we all got in the car to meet our destiny at the hospital.

Twenty minutes of death-defying driving down more of Jeddah's multi-lane roads brought us to Abdul Aziz University Hospital. I was becoming very uneasy about the prospect of driving in Jeddah.

"This place makes driving in downtown Toronto seem like a piece of cake," said Bill, looking as shocked as I.

"I'll second that," agreed Ben, the other Canadian newcomer to Saudi Arabia.

We sauntered into the hospital, a modern but drab concrete structure, and asked at reception about chest X-Rays.

"Sorry. Come back tomorrow morning. You are too late," said the pleasant man at reception. Actually, I don't remember if he

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was pleasant but the clerk in the police station made everyone else seem relatively pleasant.

As we returned to the car Bill said, "I wonder what they do if the victim of a traffic accident comes in needing an X-Ray? 'Sorry. Come back tomorrow. You're too late.'"

We picked up some lunch and returned to the compound to mentally prepare for our assault on Saudi bureaucracy the next day.

Sunday, the equivalent of Tuesday (*Would I ever get used to the days of the week?* I wondered), we set off bright and early for our chest X-Rays. All went well with the photography but there was a, by now predictable, delay in getting copies of the X-Rays to take to the police. We were not surprised to see that all our lungs received a clean bill of health and we were now optimistically cheery about our chances of getting our Saudi driver's licenses in the afternoon.

We headed back to the police station, our optimism enhanced by a light and tasty lunch at one of Jeddah's myriad of restaurants. We pulled into the same parking area as the day before.

"Where's the line?" I asked incredulously. It was difficult to imagine that efficiency had improved so much in one day.

"Not only do we need to ask where the line is," piped up Ben, "Where are the police clerks?"

We looked around flabbergasted. The building, a hive of inefficient activity the previous day, was closed up and appeared to be empty.

"You are all witnesses. It was here yesterday, right?" queried Bob. "I'm not going crazy, am I?"

"Not unless we're suffering from collective amnesia," I quipped.

"I don't believe it," said Ben, gazing around incredulously.

Taped to the window was a paper with what was for us indecipherable Arabic script. Another car pulled up and out jumped a man in dark blue Western slacks and a button up white shirt with collar. He looked Egyptian. He walked over to us.

"Salaam allay kum," said Bob to our visitor. "Do you speak English?"

"Allay kum salaam," replied the bearded, dark haired man. "Yes, I do." He took a couple of minutes to read the taped up

sheet of paper. "It appears there is a new police headquarters. I am going there now. Follow me."

So, once again, we piled into the car. We followed our savior, eventually arriving at a new three storied white painted concrete structure. It was almost comforting to see a long, sinuous line leading to the same miserable clerk from the previous day. We now recognized some people who, like us, had been waiting the day before.

It was four o'clock when we reached the front of the queue.

"Salaam allay kum," said Bob.

"Allay kum salaam," responded our clerk, scarcely looking up. "You have X-Rays?"

"Yes," we smiled, each handing an X-Ray and anticipating a prompt end to this interminable affair.

He filled in more forms.

After half an hour he looked up from his work and said, almost cheerily, "Very good. Come back tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" cried Bill, looking positively gob smacked.

"Yes. After ten in the morning."

We left, shaking our heads. There was nothing to be gained in arguing.

Back at the compound I found myself engrossed in discussion with Peter and Scott over vacation possibilities. I hadn't even started work yet and I was already dreaming of journeys to exciting and exotic destinations. They mentioned the prospect of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak. Another option was trekking in the Himalayas. Peter said he was going to return to Nepal to do some treks he hadn't done on his visit there the previous year.

"That's an excellent time to go," he expounded. "The monsoon is over so leeches are less of a problem and visibility is excellent, since the rains have removed dust from the air. And you avoid the cold of winter. I know an Australian guide who could organize a unique route. He has lived, trekked and climbed in Nepal for years. Would you like to join me?"

"I would, at this point, definitely like to keep the possibility open," I responded, quite excited by the concept of visiting the world's highest mountains.

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That night, tucked contentedly in bed, I reviewed my time since leaving Canada just a week before. I had briefly visited Zurich. I was adjusting quickly to my new life in the Middle East. I had already made new friends, and I was dreaming of further travels. I had survived my first encounters with bureaucratic apathy and ineptitude. It wasn't so bad. I was being paid, and quite well at that, to do this. The reason our contracts were so long was because we became non-tax residents of Canada if we lived and worked at least two consecutive years outside the country. Saudi Arabia had no income tax so we banked all of our earnings. Our base salaries were higher than they would be in Canada, although they weren't as lucrative as they had been for ex-patriots a few years before. We received travel allowances thrice annually and single status employees could claim for food expenses.

I slept well and dreamt of trekking along ridges and through valleys surrounded by vast snow capped peaks. I crossed boulder strewn torrents on precarious rope bridges and then, astonished, I met a surly man in a turban and he handed me a driver's license. "What are you doing here?" I gasped. "We decided to make things more interesting for you so we built a new police station in the mountains," he replied calmly, in perfect English.

The next morning, without difficulty, and in a more mundane setting than my nocturnal fantasy, we received our Saudi driver's licenses.

The great American seer Edgar Cayce once said that life on this planet is characterized by three dimensions—time, space and patience. It would appear that one of the principal lessons and tests we all receive in life is patience. I had come to an excellent place to learn just that!

In looking back I can't put the 'blame' on my parents for my adventurous instincts. They gave me a subscription to National Geographic when I was a teenager in response to the natural enthusiasm for learning that I had.

I have always been a lover of books. One of my most valued possessions as a boy was a set of children's encyclopedias. I read them from cover to cover and then read them again. I did the same with an atlas given to me by my grandmother one Christmas. I

remember clearly the regular trips to the library with my mother and the books that fascinated me most—biographies and autobiographies of explorers and adventurers.

The idea of living and working in Saudi Arabia captivated me from the moment I first heard of it from colleagues at Bell Canada who had been there on contract. The stories of these men fascinated me, and I jumped at the opportunity to go there once I had completed my night school MBA studies.

My two years in Saudi Arabia represented the beginning of a crack forming in the egg of my previous belief system. The adventures I had during that time opened my eyes to a world I had not even imagined existed. It was a world outside the 'box' of my prior existence.

That prior existence had been a mostly pleasant one. I was born in Niagara Falls, Ontario, not actually in the water but in Niagara General Hospital. I returned to that hospital at the age of four with spinal meningitis and, fortunately, recovered from this little patch of unpleasantness. If I hadn't I wouldn't be writing this story.

I was fortunate to have amazing, loving and patient parents. My mother had been a primary school teacher who gave up her career to be a full time mother for me and my two younger sisters. My father spent his entire working life with one company, Bell Canada, starting out as a lineman and finishing off as an engineering manager.

Weekends in the warmer months of my youth were dedicated to family camping trips. We all loved hiking, campfires, canoeing, and swimming. As a family we explored much of the natural beauty and cultural richness of Ontario. Once each summer we would enthusiastically pile into the car and take a longer camping vacation. In this way I came to taste a sizable portion of the vast and magnificent grandeur of Canada, and parts of America as well.

For some years I sang in the church choir, and later I played many sports, representing my high school in some of them. I loved art and music and I learned to passably play trombone and organ. After graduating from high school I went on to obtain my Bachelor of Commerce degree from McMaster University in

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Hamilton before beginning full time work with Bell Canada and studying for my MBA at night school at York University in Toronto.

A Holy City

I was assigned to work in Abyar Ali (Ali's Wells) outside of Medina, one of the holy cities of Islam. For two years home was a spacious, carpeted two bedroom apartment, in a compound that also contained an outdoor swimming pool, community games facility and library within its concrete walls. I prepared my own meals. During the week dishes and laundry were looked after by a Filipino colleague anxious to earn a little extra cash.

I dove with relish into much of the newness that surrounded me. I studied Arabic and I now saw the purpose of studying French (which had bored me in school), since roughly half of my colleagues were French Canadian. I also asked my friend and workmate, Chas, questions about the Islamic religion which he embraced with gentleness and passion. Chas was an Englishman of Pakistani heritage.

My Anglican Christian background and my schooling had done little to prepare me for a world in which people had contrasting religious training, and values with differing priorities. Religion, family and friends came before career in this society and I can't say that I could find much fault in that.

One of the questions I came away from Canada with was, 'Why have so many people in the world embraced religions different from the one in which I was raised and why do the so-called differences in these religions cause so much war and hardship around the world?' Simple logic told me that all these people couldn't be wrong.

Despite his relative youth, Chas had a wife and children back in Bradford. He was respected by the Saudis for his knowledge with telephones and for the fact that he could converse with them in Arabic. He also spoke fluent Urdu, which came in handy when visiting family in Pakistan. His desk was across from mine and he encouraged and assisted me in my Arabic studies. He was also a

keen and competent squash partner for me in the evenings in which we indulged in sport. I asked Chas about the origins of Islam.

Chas happily explained, "It was about the year 610 that an Arab merchant retired with his family to a cave on Mount Hira in the Meccan valley to make a spiritual retreat. This is a place that I and many, many Muslims visit during Hajj each year. On the seventeenth night of Ramadan the merchant, Muhammad ibn Abdallah, or, as you know John, 'Muhammad, Son of Abdallah', was torn from his sleep in his mountain cave and felt himself embraced by a devastating divine presence claiming to be the Angel Gabriel that commanded him to 'Recite!'

"He suddenly found divinely inspired words pouring forth from his mouth. As you know this new holy book came to be called the Qu'ran which means 'The Recitation'. The Qu'ran consists of written and oral records compiled during Muhammad's lifetime and in the years immediately following his death. I'm lucky to be able to read it in the original Arabic. It is extraordinarily poetic and powerful. Some of its divine essence gets lost in translation.

"John, the consequences of Muhammad's experience were huge. When he began to preach the Word in Mecca, the whole of Arabia was in a state of chronic disunity. As a skilled statesman and commander, he was able to unify the Arab nations. Such was the power unleashed by Muhammad's teachings, that within a century of his death Islam stretched from Spain to the Himalayas."

"Chas, I know that one of the things he taught was that you should pray five times a day. What else did he teach?"

"Muhammad declared there was but one God and that he was a messenger of God. Each time we pray we recite the creed, 'La illaha illa 'llah Muhammad Rasula Ilah' ('There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet'), we affirm this. Muhammad preached universal brotherhood. Every Muslim has five fundamental religious duties, known as the Pillars of Islam. Each must recite the creed, pray five times a day facing Mecca, fast during the month of Ramadan, give alms to the poor and make a pilgrimage to Mecca."

"The pilgrimage is the Hajj?"

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“Yes, and every Muslim is to make that pilgrimage at least once in their life if possible. Many don’t, of course. For those of us that live and work here it is much easier.”

“I hear people in the office mention Issa (Eesa). That’s Jesus, isn’t it?”

“Yes it is. The teachings of Islam were first revealed at the time of Creation and according to these teachings, prophets are periodically sent to earth to reaffirm God’s Word. Hence, the Qu’ran, like the Bible, is historical. These prophets or messengers are considered to be divine and include the Hebrew patriarchs, Abraham and Moses, as well as Jesus. As you’ve already heard, Jesus is called Issa, and Moses is called Musa.

“Muhammad was sent by God to restore purity. He was the last prophet; the next will be the Messiah.”

John P. Haines



2

Mountains, Lakes and Lotus

My companions and co-workers in Saudi Arabia would sometimes joke that it was unsafe to travel with me. One never knew what would happen. There was a little truth in that.

In May of 1984 I had returned to Ontario for my sister Cathy's wedding. I managed stays in Morocco and New York City during that first trip away from the Middle East, giving me a taste of things to come. In late June I was due to go on my first trip to a more exotic land. I had been gathering ideas from long term Saudi colleagues about some of the more interesting places to visit. I had decided to fly to Kenya and Tanzania and possibly climb Mount Kilimanjaro. Plans were proceeding to this end with the assistance of a most obliging travel agent in Jeddah. But the travel agent kept bumping into snags with visas and flight availability. So, just two weeks before my scheduled departure, I heeded the advice of this Indian travel agent and decided to go to Kashmir instead. My family in Canada still expected Africa to be my destination. Little did any of us know what was in store.

This was the time when Indira Gandhi was India's leader and the Indian National Army had recently entered and bombed the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the most sacred shrine in Sikhdom. To the Sikhs this was sacrilege equivalent to the horror Muslims would feel if the Kabala in Mecca was bombed by radical Christians or the outrage Roman Catholics would suffer if the Vatican was taken over by Muslim extremists.

All this was far from my mind as I settled into a houseboat on Nagin Lake in Kashmir. Coincidentally, the houseboat which I shared with fellow Canadians Don and Jane Perry was named the

‘Canada Houseboat’. Don was also working for Bell Canada International and he and Jane were stationed in Abha, in the mountains in the southwest of Saudi Arabia near the Yemen border.

We soon became fast friends and enjoyed many evenings together being poled around the lake in a shikara, Kashmir’s equivalent of a gondola. Srinagar is a canal town, like its Italian counterpart, Venice. The city’s canals feed into the adjoining Dal and Nagin lakes and the whole of the verdant Kashmir Valley is encircled by magnificent mountains. To float quietly in a shikara on the glass-like lake reflecting the setting sun while vividly colored kingfishers dive and locals tend their floating gardens is to be transported to a paradise of peace and tranquility. It is appropriate that the pink lotus, holy flower of the East, grows abundantly on the lakes.

Most days I hired a taxi to visit some of the wondrous spots in the vale, like the world’s highest golf course at Gulmarg. In Sonamarg, surrounded by snow capped peaks strangely reminiscent of the Canadian Rockies in Banff and Jasper, I had been approached by an excited Indian man. He waved his arms at me to stop going down a track beside an icy stream.

“Shooting!” he cried.

It struck me as a strange place for shooting. I proceeded with caution. Around the next turn I came upon an elaborate movie set and actors in glittering, colorful attire. India has a vibrant and enormous movie industry. I had happened upon the kind of ‘shooting’ I could handle.

Hijacked

In the course of my stay tensions grew between the local Muslim population, under Kashmir’s leader Dr. Farouq Abdullah, and the Central Indian Government, represented by national soldiers in Srinagar. It seemed that the predominantly Muslim Kashmiri population resented the meddling of the largely Hindu-backed central government. There was a very real independence

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movement which was being increasingly discouraged by the Indian national army.

Don and Jane flew out a few days before my scheduled departure. They were returning to Saudi Arabia where Don had more than a year remaining in his contract with BCI. I would miss their camaraderie.

By now Srinagar residents had called for a general strike and all shops and businesses were closed. It became virtually impossible to find transport for sightseeing and the streets of Srinagar became increasingly violent. I decided that it would be best to leave earlier than planned. It was July 6, 1984. Just after sunup I said goodbye to my congenial host and crossed the lake by shikara. The oppressive tension in Srinagar seemed to permeate even this tranquil lake scene. It was definitely time to leave. At the Srinagar wharf I was notified that I wouldn't be able to get a taxi from this usual point to the airport. There was a blackout in town and violence in the streets.

"What am I to do?" I asked my friendly and familiar shikara pilot, Abdullah.

"I can try to take you through canals on the edge of the city to a point closer to the airport, sir."

"OK. Let's give it a try."

We slipped quietly through a tangle of narrow and dirty channels. This was uncharted territory for me and I relied totally on Abdullah to get us through. In the past week we had become friends. I trusted him implicitly. The city had been transformed from a charming labyrinth of canals and medieval buildings into a dark and sinister place. Almost no one was to be seen. A few times rocks were hurled at us. Fortunately, we were not hit. Our assailants seemed to realize that this blonde outsider had little to do with their internal conflict. Abdullah poled patiently on. The rat-tat of gunfire could be heard in the distance. I secretly hoped that it would stay in the distance.

At last we arrived at another dock. Abdullah tied the boat and handed me my backpack. He called out to a policeman and they conversed in Kashmiri.

Abdullah turned to me, "Try waiting here sir. There should be a bus to the airport."

I gratefully shook his hand and paid him for his efforts. There were many policemen and soldiers standing around in small groups. I saw no civilians. The policeman directed me to what appeared to be a municipal building. Within a few minutes I was seated on a bus riding through lush farms and orchards on the way to the airport. No longer blocked by buildings, the sun turned the inside of the bus into an oven. It was with regret that I recalled I hadn't brought any water with me.

The airport, a scene of serenity and order on my arrival, was now bedlam. I was obviously not the only one attempting to leave Kashmir.

How am I ever going to get on a flight? I thought as I pushed my way through the nervous and unruly crowd to the Indian Airline domestic counter.

"Is it possible to get on the next flight to Delhi?" I asked the harried attendant. I didn't envy him that day.

"Sorry sir. All flights are full," he said, hardly looking up. He must have already repeated those same words many times that morning.

What am I to do now? I thought. I didn't look forward to pushing through the crowd again. Under other circumstances I would have been enthralled with the diverse and eclectic mix of people; the women in their vivid saris, bright as peacocks; men in duller traditional garb, the curious Indian version of Western suits, or in uniform; Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians speaking in tongues unintelligible to me. Many carried split wooden crates of Kashmir's famous cherries. Obviously this was a tourist destination for lowland Indians. And they all wanted to leave at the same time.

"Did I hear you wanted to fly to Delhi?" The question came from a tall handsome Sikh in his late twenties. His head was topped with a huge orange turban.

"Yes," I shouted over the din of the crowd.

He guided me fluidly through the throng to a quieter spot at the edge of the room.

"Let me introduce myself, good sir. My name is Chandar Singh. My friends call me Chan. I come often to Kashmir on business. I came up last week by bus. I too want to get a flight to Delhi. With all this trouble in Srinagar there is no work for me

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here now. I know some people working for Indian Airlines. Shall I try to get seats for us both?"

This man spoke fluently and with confidence. He was dressed impeccably in the traditional churidar of the Sikh. He was no fraud. I responded immediately without a hint of doubt as to Chan's integrity.

"Yes. I would like that," I replied, genuinely thankful to be receiving help. I gave him my ticket and passport and watched as he easily maneuvered into an Indian airlines office. Chan was a giant of a man, almost a head clear of most Indians. I could follow his movements with ease. He was obviously on friendly terms with the airline staff. I watched as he applied his charm and joked with them. Their smiles turned to laughter. From time to time he pointed over at me. I reciprocated with little waves. It looked as if one of the men was comparing my passport photo with my distant image. It wasn't long before Chan returned with his ever present smile and tickets and boarding cards for us both.

"We're on the next flight," he informed me triumphantly. "We have to go through security now."

"Thanks a lot," I responded. I didn't know how Chan had done it but I was grateful.

Security was more scrupulous than I had ever encountered. I saw that some people were guided into private rooms. Chan told me they were being strip searched. In addition to a meticulous search of our bags and other carry on items we had to remove our shoes for further scrutiny. I wished I had washed my socks the previous day on the houseboat. Still, we moved along reasonably quickly and soon were seated in the final waiting area. We were able to observe the continuing intense security checks that the remaining passengers were subjected to.

As we were called to board for our flight I noticed a group of eight or nine young Sikh men, recognizable in their turbans, dash through security to get on board. None were as big or as fastidiously attired as Chan. Their rapid transit seemed incongruous after the careful searching the rest of us had received. I glanced at Chan to see if he had noticed, but he looked as calm as always. *They must be late and have contacts in security*, I thought.

I settled into my right aisle seat about halfway back on the full plane. Chan had the window seat beside me. I once again mentally thanked my stars for the assistance I had received in getting on this flight. I looked forward to finding a clean hotel room in New Delhi when our one-and-a-half hour flight was completed. While on the houseboat I had developed a severe case of diarrhea so I was anticipating indulging in some more hygienically prepared food. I chuckled to myself. *At least I can't call this 'Delhi belly'; perhaps 'houseboat horror' was more apt.* I hadn't eaten since the morning before in an effort to settle my stomach so I was hungry now.

Orange Juice Please

The flight began uneventfully enough. I looked out the window over Chan's shoulder, watching Kashmir's magnificent mountain scenery recede from sight. The flight attendants were just beginning to serve orange juice. I watched expectantly as the two attractive attendants in saris steadily approached us. My tummy was rumbling. I was now thirsty as well as hungry.

Some young Sikh men ran up both aisles from the back of the plane. Could these be the men who had boarded so hurriedly? I wondered if one of their friends had fallen ill, and these men were rushing forward to notify the flight attendants.

There was the loud pop of a gun and gasps and screams as a bullet ricocheted around the plane. I, as well as everyone else, knew immediately that something was seriously wrong. It soon became apparent that we were being hijacked. The nine men I had seen rushing onto the plane at the end of boarding were commandeering the plane.

I heard later that the pilot and co-pilot had locked their cabin door and the gun was used to break the lock so that the hijackers could force access to the forward cabin. Fortunately for us all, the bullet didn't appear to puncture the outer shell of the plane so no decompression occurred. Two of the hijackers moved forward and one took over the seat of the co-pilot, who had received a small graze on his neck from the bullet.

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Six or seven other men began to patrol the airplane. Two of the men looked to be in their thirties. These men were very calm and focused and each carried a gun. They appeared to be leaders of this group. The rest of the men were very young. One hadn't even grown a beard yet. This was easy to determine because Sikhs honour a religious code forbidding the cutting of hair.

Each of the remaining younger hijackers carried a knife. Without exception these men were very tense and masked their fear with angry looks and gestures.

After a couple of initial gasps the passengers sat dead still and silent in their seats. One of the two 'leaders' stood beside a flight attendant who had stopped serving orange juice just a few seats in front of us, much to my disappointment. This man spoke steadily and softly to the flight attendant who then relayed his message through the plane's public address system. She wasn't speaking English. This was understandable as there were only a few foreigners on the flight.

"What is she saying?" I dared to whisper to Chan. I wanted to know what was going on, but I didn't want to disturb the men patrolling the plane. These assailants held their knives up at head height, tensely, ready to strike at the least provocation. They reminded me of coiled snakes, capable of serious or deadly bites, out of fear. I didn't want to draw any attention to us.

"It is to do with the occupation of the Golden Temple by government troops. Most Sikhs are very angry about that. These men wish to attract more international attention for this injustice," whispered Chan back to me.

I recalled some of the news stories I had read over the outrage Sikhs felt when Indian troops had stormed the Golden Temple.

The temple is located in Amritsar, the largest city in India's Punjab province. Amritsar was founded a little over 400 years ago by Guru Ram Das, the fourth of the ten Sikh Gurus. His son and successor, the fifth Guru, Arjan, raised a temple in the midst of a pool, sanctified its waters and invested the Sikh Holy Scripture, the Granth Sahib, in its inner sanctum. The city takes its name from the sacred pool: amrit (nectar) and sar (pool).

I decided to chance one more whispered question. "Where are we headed?"

"I don't know."

We stopped talking, neither of us keen to continue and risk censure from our keepers.

Our scheduled time of arrival in New Delhi came and went and still we flew on. Then I noticed the plane making sweeping circles over a large city.

"Where do you think we are?" I whispered to Chan furtively.

"I'm not sure," he replied softly, "It's definitely not Delhi. Maybe it's Lahore." If that was the case we had entered Pakistani airspace.

My tummy continued to rumble and, although I hadn't eaten for over twenty four hours I knew I would have to go to the toilet soon. I didn't look forward to walking the gauntlet of the highly strung hijackers to do so. One of the two leaders came near us and I motioned to him. Through Chan I asked for permission to visit the lavatory. He agreed without hesitation and called out to the young hijackers at the back of the plane.

I got up and walked back along the aisle. I glanced around the plane and saw a couple of Western faces. They returned my nod. There obviously weren't many of us on board. At least I wasn't alone.

I was on edge squeezing past the unbearded baby faced highjacker who could have easily been in his teens. What had motivated him to risk his life for this venture? He held his knife tightly and raised it to head level. His arm was shaking. For an instant I caught a glimpse of his eyes. They spoke eloquently. This young man was far more frightened than I was. I made short work in the toilet. I noted how clean it was. Most of the passengers seemed to be holding their bowels and bladders. Who wouldn't if possible? I was relieved in more ways than one when I returned to my seat a few minutes later.

Some children seated in front of us began to cry. The leader spoke to the flight attendant on our side of the plane, who soon brought milk to the children. They stopped crying almost immediately. The airplane continued to circle the metropolis below us. I nodded off.

When I awoke the late afternoon light had faded and a brilliant crimson ellipse remained where the sun had dipped below the horizon. The first lights in the city below appeared. Despite our uncertain destiny there was no denying the beauty of that moment.

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I checked my watch. We had been in the air for approximately five hours, more than three hours longer than the originally scheduled flight. A lump settled uneasily in my throat.

What if we run out of fuel? I wondered. Almost as soon as I noted this thought, the plane began to descend. A relatively smooth landing followed. It was met with an eerie silence by the passengers. I heard later that the Pakistani authorities had steadfastly refused permission to land until the pilot rather desperately explained that we were getting dangerously low on fuel.

With the engines now switched off, we also lost the air conditioning. A stifling heat soon permeated the plane.

The hijackers took over the plane's public address system from the flight attendants. The two leaders took turns speaking. I had no idea what they were saying save for a word repeated frequently that sounded like 'Zinzabad'.

"What are they saying?" I asked Chan, keeping my voice low.

"Zinzabad would be the name of an independent Punjab state should it separate from India," he informed me.

We were soon enveloped in an oppressive tropical darkness. The chanting of the hijackers stopped. All that could be heard was the muffled cacophony of the breathing of my fellow passengers and the fluttering beat of my heart. Doing my best to ignore my hunger, I slept fitfully through the night.

Dawn came as a welcome break to the restless night. Glancing out the window past Chan's sleeping form, I saw that the plane was now surrounded by armed Pakistani soldiers, crouching behind sandbags.

The hijack leaders were busy ensuring the children remained happy. In addition to dispensing milk, the men were now distributing the delicious-looking Kashmiri cherries put in the overhead lockers by some of the passengers. Unfortunately these fruits, like the orange juice, never quite made it to us.

One of the two leaders stopped to talk to me while he was patrolling the plane. An average sized man with a kind face, he asked, "Where are you from?"

"Canada," I replied.

"I hear that Canada is a beautiful country. I have family living in Toronto now."

“That’s nice,” I responded. I couldn’t help thinking that this was a bizarre interchange. It helped me to humanize the highjackers to engage in such a personal conversation with one of them. He had been a genuinely friendly man.

The highjackers resumed the prayers and chanting they had used the previous night. Many of the Sikhs on board, including Chan, joined in the chanting.

The sun turned the stationary plane into an oven. The soporific effect of the heat was a blessing for me. By intermittently dozing off, the time passed quickly and I was given respite from my nagging hunger and thirst. The heat caused me to sweat profusely, saving me from another nerve wracking lavatory excursion. I could see that some of the elderly people seated near us seemed to be particularly distressed by the heat.

“What’s he saying, Chan?” I asked, “Did I hear the word doctor?”

“He’s asking if there is a doctor on board. Someone is quite ill; maybe a heart attack.”

A man, presumably a doctor, got up from his seat and motioned to one of the leaders. He was led to the front of the plane.

There was an Indian soldier seated a few rows in front of us. He said something to one of the hijackers. The hijacker reacted violently, rapping the soldier over the head with a wooden staff and tearing the epaulettes from his uniform.

He’s going to have some headache! I thought.

The highjackers continued to make announcements that I didn’t understand and that Chan wouldn’t translate for me. I couldn’t fathom his reticence. Lunchtime came and went. Several times orange juice and cherries were passed out. They never quite made it to us.

The highjackers grew increasingly nervous. They continued to do everything they could to keep the children happy but there was irritation in the voices of the leaders when they broadcast over the plane’s public address system. Periodically I would hear the word ‘Zinzabad’ in their discourses. Chan now told me that Zinzabad is used to mean ‘Long live...’ After the next announcement people all over the plane openly wept and began to pray. I suddenly felt a wave of uneasiness flow through me.

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“What did he say, Chan?” I asked. “Why are all of these people praying?”

Chan said nothing but I detected a glistening teardrop in the corner of his eye. I grabbed his arm and insisted, “What did he say?”

He looked at me. His sad eyes spoke volumes, “The hijackers have been told that the government of Pakistan has turned down their demands and they are going to blow up the plane.”

Oh my God, I thought. I hadn’t counted on this; and I still hadn’t received any orange juice or cherries. Sometimes life just didn’t seem fair.

We all sat in shock. To everyone’s credit no one became outwardly hysterical. There was a quiet resigned feeling on board, a sort of acceptance of things as they were.

We waited; some, I’m sure, anticipating the worst. I kept thinking, *These guys don’t really have a bomb on board, do they? They only rushed onto the plane in Srinagar at the last minute. Sure, they brought a few weapons on board, but could they have actually been able to secure a bomb on the aircraft?* My brain chattered incessantly, a meager remedy for the uneasiness that was metamorphosing into fear. Still this inner dialogue acted as a balm that allowed me to retain my sanity and calm despite the discomfort and uncertainty.

Ten minutes passed.

Twenty minutes passed. The hands on my watch were moving even though it seemed that time was standing still.

Half an hour passed. One of the leaders, a huge smile on his face, made another announcement. The passengers erupted into cheers. The mood transformation was instantaneous and dramatic. A couple of men near the hijacker jumped up and embraced him. He returned their hugs warmly.

“What’s going on, Chan?” I asked.

He answered without hesitation this time, “They have decided not to blow up the plane. We can get off now.” Passengers in front of us were retrieving their carry on luggage from the overhead lockers and some were beginning to disembark. I looked at my watch. Twenty seven hours had elapsed since we boarded the plane in Srinagar the previous day. A wave of relief swept over me, tinged with a mild but persistent disappointment. Did this

mean that I really wouldn't get a chance to taste some of those Kashmiri cherries? We grabbed our cabin belongings and descended the stairs onto the tarmac.

I wondered if this was the time to broach the topic of service with the hijackers. How would I put it? 'Next time remember to bring orange juice and cherries to all of the passengers.'

We shuffled around in the sultry heat as all of the luggage was unloaded right there, in the middle of the airfield. Each bag was individually checked and matched to a passenger. There was obviously some concern over bombs. I took some photos as the hijackers walked off the plane. They certainly didn't appear to be under arrest. I watched as they stood slightly apart from the rest of the 250 passengers, casually chatting with some Pakistani soldiers. You would think they had just returned from a vacation.

I saw the co-pilot with a bandage around his head descend the steps under his own steam. Two elderly people were carried from the plane and hustled away on stretchers. A European passenger turned to me and said, "They both had heart attacks."

Once each bag had been successfully matched to a passenger, airport buses rolled up and carried us to the main arrivals terminal. The airport had been closed in response to the hijacking so we had plenty of space to stretch out. Initially we were kept apart from the press and curious onlookers. Representatives from various embassies were ushered in and a British consul officer approached me.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

"Canada."

"Is there anyone you want called?"

"Yes. My parents." I gave him the necessary details.

We were brought a meal of rice and a bottle of Coke. It wasn't much but at this point anything tasted good. There was a relaxed, celebratory atmosphere in the large open room. We lounged in comfortable chairs and I chatted with a couple of other Westerners. It felt wonderful to have escaped from the cramped confines of the aircraft. I'm not usually a lover of air conditioning but the cool circulating air was most welcome. Print and television reporters followed the embassy officials

"May I ask a few questions sir?" The young, friendly Pakistani reporter smiled at me.

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“Sure. Why not,” I replied.

“How were you treated by the hijackers?” he probed.

“Quite good,” I responded. “Children were given milk and other food. The hijackers did their best to meet the needs of the passengers despite the difficult circumstances.”

The reporter grew restless. I got the impression he wasn’t satisfied with what I had to say. He walked over to a nearby Indian couple.

“What were the hijackers like?” the reporter addressed the husband.

“Very unkind. They beat a soldier over the head with a metal rod.” As I mentioned earlier, I had been sitting nearby at the time of this altercation, and I had witnessed the soldier being hit with a wooden stick rather than a metal rod.

The reporter, now satisfied with the responses he was getting, asked these people many more questions. I found it interesting how the passengers, as well as the reporter, were intent on sensationalizing what had actually happened.

After more media interviews a public address announcement was made. “It will be another four to five hours before we can fly you all to Delhi. We are arranging bus tours of Lahore for those passengers who are interested.”

Why not? I thought. Most of my fellow passengers felt the same and we were soon distributed over several buses driving around Lahore to look at the sights.

Unfortunately, no one actually pointed out what we were seeing. Another Westerner, a Brit, and I provided commentary on our bus.

“This folks, would appear to be, could quite possibly be, almost certainly is an important building,” I extolled.

My fellow tour guide followed my lead, “Look out to your right. This may very well be the most important mosque in this part of Lahore.”

We carried on in this way for the duration of the one hour ‘tour’. After the tension we had all experienced, even the most staid passenger relaxed and enjoyed the improvised tour.

Our arrival in New Delhi’s outdated airport was a complete contrast to the respect and order we had experienced in the Lahore

air terminal. It looked as if every living relative and friend was there to greet the homecoming passengers. We had to fight through the crowds of onlookers. Television reporters shoved bulky cameras in our faces. I was interviewed yet again. I soon tired of this and pushed my way outside and hailed a taxi. I was whisked away to an up market comfortable hotel. The taxi driver refused to honor the chit I had been given in the terminal. I was in no mood to argue. *Welcome to India*, I thought.

I made a point of looking in the papers the next day to read the stories related to the hijacking. It was front page news. What was printed bore little resemblance to the actual events that had transpired. The printed words were far more sensational than the facts. I had never been much of a newspaper reader. Since that time in 1984 I have rarely paid much attention to the news, and when I have, I have tried to read between the lines to get to the truth.

Back in Saudi Arabia I found out my colleagues had already seen me being interviewed about my adventure on Saudi Arabian television. I said to my friends, "Don't ever get hijacked if you like orange juice. They don't always serve it on hijacked planes."

I called my parents in Ontario. My father answered, "On the day that the passengers were released, while watching the six o'clock news, the neighbors saw you walking off the plane. They, like us, thought you were visiting Africa, so they didn't know whether to believe it was actually you. Finally, they called us and suggested we watch the eleven o'clock news. We did, and sure enough, we were more than a little surprised to see you on the television."

"Did the British Embassy in Lahore call you?"

"Yes. But not until the next day. Still, it was good to hear definitively that you were well."

Within a month Sikhs had hijacked another plane in Indian airspace. I didn't find out if orange juice was served to all the passengers. In a short while there was a spate of hijackings on the world stage. One successful effort serves as an impetus for similar attempts.

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Holy Land

It is beyond the scope and purpose of this book to delve in depth into my two years in the Middle East. I thoroughly enjoyed the small kaleidoscopic and ever-changing international community in which I lived and worked. I absolutely loved the frequent trips some of my colleagues and I made to the Red Sea for snorkeling and diving. I encountered sharks, a manta ray, and sea turtles and reveled in the iridescent richness and immense diversity of the pristine coral reef life of the sea.

I reveled too in the stark beauty and ancient history of the desert, visiting ancient Nabatean structures hewn from the existing rock in Madein Saleh in Saudi Arabia and in Petra in Jordan. I observed petroglyphs of long horned cattle on nearby natural monoliths, indicating that this parched and eroded landscape had once been a more verdant environment capable of supporting pastoral agriculture that didn't rely on the goat and the camel.

I visited Dubai, Egypt, and Syria along with more far flung destinations. I came to love the playful innocence of my Saudi colleagues and the genuine devout nature of the Bedouin, who would pull his Hilux pickup off the side of the road at sunset, and pray, oblivious of the world driving past.

When I left Saudi Arabia for good at the end of my contract in January 1986 I returned to Jordan and then crossed the Allenby Bridge into Israel, meeting two other backpackers on the way. Together we explored some of the vast history of the Holy Land, a place of city built upon city, and temple upon temple, its history stretching back into the dim recesses of human memory. This was truly Holy Land, where one could not help but feel exceedingly close to the ancient—and the divine. My skepticism of recorded history melted away as we touched the places of the dead. This skepticism had grown out of the awareness that history is not necessarily what happened. History is what is written down, almost always by the conquerors, rather than the conquered. I also found it ironic that the word 'history' revealed its masculine parentage. How often do we read of 'herstory'?

We visited the prison in Akka that had housed Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Baha'i faith, hiked the twisting rock canyons of

Kumran, where the ancient Essenes had lived and worked, and where the Dead Sea Scrolls had been discovered in the twentieth century by a Bedouin goat herder. We observed those same scrolls behind glass in a museum dedicated to their safekeeping in Jerusalem. We ventured to Masada and wondered at the courage of the martyrs who had lived out their final days in defiance of the siege of the powerful Romans. We stood at Capernaum where the multitudes had been fed on a few loaves and fishes, and where the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ was preached. And we retraced with excitement, admiration and anguish the last immortal footsteps of Jesus through the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher and the ancient, narrow streets of Jerusalem. New sensations of the present intermingled with stories from the past, particularly of a Jewish sage whose life and death continues to influence a vast portion of humanity.

Somewhat unwillingly I returned to Canada where I worked for a few months in the north-east part of Toronto for Bell Canada. However, seeds of wanderlust had been sown in my impressionable psyche and it wasn’t many weeks before I embarked on a long-anticipated six month around-the-world adventure. Little did I know that it was to turn out dramatically different from my plans. I was twenty eight.



3

*Every now and then beautiful angels appear
cleverly disguised as ordinary human beings.*

Adèle Basheer

Together Lost

London, May, 1986.

“Can you tell me where I might find the Russia-Scandinavia tour bus?” asked the blonde stranger.

After a restless night spent in one of London’s crowded traveler hostels I had been searching in vain for the bus that would take me on my next adventure, a six week camping tour of Scandinavia and the Eastern European communist states. The 8.30 am departure time was rapidly approaching. I had long dreamed of visiting the Soviet Union and an organized tour, as much as that left creative travel aside, was one of the easiest ways to do so. The tour companies organized much of the paper work and visas necessary to visit these countries.

“Do you know where the tour bus is?” asked the young man again. He had a South African accent and a friendly, handsome face. I was more than a little surprised to have this absolute stranger voice the very question that was on my lips.

“Funny you should ask. I’m looking for the same bus,” I responded, smiling back at this man. “Let’s look for it together. It can’t be far away.”

John P. Haines

So it was that I met Dean, the shy, muscular Cape Town native who was taking time out from construction work in London.

We did find that bus around the next corner. We were the last to arrive. We stowed our bags in the boot locker and chose a bench seat beside one another. We quickly found out that aside from a couple of Canadian girls in their late teens, we were the only travelers on the tour who were not from Australia or New Zealand. There is something divinely 'right' about two lost people meeting each other. Perhaps it happens more often than most of us realize.

I didn't feel that I quite fit with this group of people, most of whom were younger than me. I no longer drank alcohol and I was a vegetarian. Dean was a very light drinker and he, like me, was particular about what he chose to eat, so I felt comfortable in his presence.

Soon the bus took a ferry across to Belgium and we spent the first night of the tour in Amsterdam. Over the next week we carried on up to Denmark and Sweden and we were soon enjoying the beautiful fiords north of Oslo.

"I'm Going to Die"

I leaned over to Dean and said, "I feel horrible." I was beginning to feel sick to my stomach and had the faint beginnings of a headache. We were on the bus driving along a road cut through snow banks the height of the bus.

"Perhaps you've got a touch of food poisoning, John," said Stan, the friendly red headed Kiwi whom both Dean and I had befriended. Stan had sometimes joined me for my morning run.

"Maybe I do," I groaned, lying down on the seat. In a matter of minutes I had a whopping headache and it felt like my cranium was beginning to swell. My neck had a dull ache and stiffness to it.

A few minutes later I called out, "I think I'm going to die!" I had never voiced these words before and I wasn't sure where they

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were coming from now. I was terrified. I must have been delirious.

“John, take a couple of aspirins,” interjected Maree, a tiny Australian who had become a friend. It is amazing how quickly bonds are established between people when you travel together. Maree handed me the painkillers. It was rare for me to use any medicine but I was grateful for this offer now.

I lay down again and dozed off. I was incredibly grateful when the bus stopped and our travel was over for the day. I was doubly grateful that tonight was to be our first night in quite comfortable cabins after night after night of camping. The thought of a tent was not an appealing idea at this moment. Dean and Stan helped me to a lower bunk.

I had excruciating pain in my head, which now felt as if it was swollen up like a balloon.

“My neck is too stiff to bend. Can you guys help to get my shoes off?” Dean and Stan were happy to oblige. They helped me to get under the covers.

“We’re going off for the evening meal, John. Would you like us to bring you anything?” Stan sounded concerned.

“No thanks. I can’t even think of food right now,” I responded, pushing my hands into my head in a vain attempt to stem the pain. Sleep, soon coming, provided a welcome relief from my pounding head.

That night passed by in a blur of repeated somnolent trips to the toilet to vomit. Despite evacuating my stomach all night I felt even worse in the morning. My head felt as if a herd of Norwegian reindeer had stamped on it all night. Stan and Dean helped get me up and get my shoes on. They supported me as I stumbled out to the bus. That is all that I remember. At this point I slipped into a coma.

I heard later that our tour leader became very concerned. They stopped at the next village and consulted with a doctor. When the doctor observed my comatose form and heard the other symptoms which now included spots all over my arms he regretfully diagnosed me as having spinal meningitis. The spots are a result of blood vessels bursting throughout my body. This is a symptom of advanced meningitis. The doctor prepared to give me a massive injection of penicillin.

Because of all the sensitivities and allergies I had as a child I had been tested and found to be allergic to penicillin. For years I had worn a Medic Alert bracelet around my right wrist. The bracelet had been torn off and lost during a cross country skiing accident years before and I had neglected to replace it. I carried a printed warning of my penicillin allergy in my wallet.

I awoke abruptly from the coma to find that I was lying on my back. I saw a doctor above me holding a large, full and ready to inject needle before my eyes. The doctor was flanked by two nurses on one side and three female friends from my trip.

Maree looked at me in surprise. "Oh, hello John. You're awake. Are you allergic to penicillin?"

"Yes," I replied and slipped immediately back into the coma. The memory of waking up to see these six people above me is still etched indelibly in my mind twenty years later.

It was decided to take me to a hospital in the town of Molde where they would be better equipped to look after me. There they had access to the sulfur-based drugs the doctor figured I would need since penicillin was no longer an option.

A couple of friends from the tour group accompanied me on the ambulance trip that involved one more ferry crossing and some twisting roads to get to Molde. I only heard about this later. The next day, twenty seven hours after I initially went into a coma, I returned to consciousness with a splitting headache in what appeared to be a small, private hospital room. I was being drip fed on intravenous.

After a short time, a nurse, with a cloth over her mouth and nose, looking like a bank robber in white, quietly entered the room.

"Oh, hello. Good to see you back with us. You're a lucky young man," she exclaimed.

"Where am I?" I asked. "What's going on?"

"You have spinal meningitis. You are in the hospital in Molde, a small town in Norway. I will let the doctor explain more to you later." She checked out the intravenous and some monitoring devices and then left the room as quietly as she had entered. My impression of her now was more of a talking ghost than of a bank robber. For the next two weeks this one pleasant nurse was my only regular visitor. I saw a doctor a few times, but the other

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nurses rarely entered my room. Perhaps they were afraid of contracting meningitis, or they were not confident in English.

A few hours later the doctor visited me. He was a self-assured, calm, neat and serious looking man in his forties with dark hair.

"Hello John," he said, "How are you feeling?"

"My head aches and it feels like I could sleep for a week," I responded, remaining prone in the bed.

He looked at me understandingly, "That's not unusual. You will be with us for awhile. We are all happy to see you out of the coma. Do you have any questions?"

"How did I get this, meningitis, that is?" I asked.

"Meningitis is highly contagious. For some unknown reason we have a few cases of it in this part of Norway at this time every year. A teenage boy died last week here in the hospital. Meningitis usually attacks children or young people who are fit and healthy. It is a mystery why one person gets it and another person doesn't."

"Where are the other people from my tour?" I asked, anticipating the answer but not yet wanting to believe it.

The doctor continued in his calm and quiet manner, "I've encouraged them to continue their trip. There is nothing they can do for you by staying here. They are all taking penicillin now since they have been in contact with you. At this stage we wouldn't allow them to visit you.

"As for your headache we have you on morphine through the intravenous for now. If you have difficulty sleeping we can give you some sleeping pills."

"Thanks, doctor," I said as he left, presumably to continue his rounds. I promptly fell asleep.

I lay there with nothing to do but think and it even hurt to do that. My head was pounding as though a rock band was playing inside. It wasn't a group I was particularly fond of but at least it was rhythmic. There was no television in the room, which was probably a blessing.

The friendly nurse returned to change my bed pan. I felt embarrassed but it was all in a day's work for her. When finished she said, "You've got some visitors." In walked my Australian friends from the trip, Maree and Sue, with Nancy, the American tour leader.

"Hi folks," I smiled.

Nancy smiled in return. "We have a little gift for you. It's from the whole group. We didn't think the hospital staff would be happy if everyone came in here." She handed me a rubbery two headed troll that must have been a foot high.

"Thanks," I said, genuinely touched by their thoughtfulness. I can't say the troll(s) looked friendly but I knew that every time I looked at that creature I would think of my friends. I was going to need that in the lonely days ahead.

Nancy went on in her friendly manner, "Now that we see and hear that you're on the mend we're going to carry on with the tour. The doctor says we should. He says you won't be able to rejoin the tour. If it is at all possible for you, you are welcome to join us at any stage in the weeks ahead. The troll is to look out for you from us."

"Thanks. Are you all healthy?" I asked.

"Yes, they put the whole lot of us on penicillin," interjected Sue. "Thanks for that John." I could see that she was kidding and I did my best to smile through the haze of pain. I liked these people.

"You dag John," said Maree, "You sure gave us a scare. I'm still amazed at how you regained consciousness just as you were about to be injected with penicillin."

"I'm amazed too and very grateful," I said, close to tears. "I'll never forget seeing you and Sue looking down at me then. It feels like someone was looking out for me."

"That's for sure," agreed Maree.

"All the best," said Nancy. "We'll call you regularly the next while."

"Give my regards to everybody and I hope you have a great tour," I said. "Don't party too much."

They laughed, waved once and were gone. I was going to miss their friendship. They were as good as their word and called me every day while they toured through Norway. They were all quite excited when describing their foray beyond the Arctic Circle with the almost continuous daylight. Stan spoke to me once, as did Dean. These calls were the highlight of my tedious days in the hospital. I wondered if I would ever see any of these fellow travelers again.

I called my parents from the phone in the hall not long after. The friendly nurse wheeled me out there. Just to be beyond the

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four white walls of the room felt like an escape from purgatory. Mom answered and I asked if Dad could pick up another phone. I knew they had several in the house. That was one of the perks of having worked for the telephone company. I explained to them what had happened and where I was. They were surprised and shocked. Customarily, they didn't break down or become hysterical. I appreciated that.

"Are you really OK?" Mom asked with a little tremor in her voice.

"Yes. I really am, Mom."

"What's it like there in the hospital? Do you have everything you need?" asked Dad, ever practical.

"Oh they look after me well enough. But, frankly, I'm bored. Only one nurse talks to me. These folks are not the friendliest. I can't wait to come home."

"We look forward to when you do John," said Mom, "Any idea how long it will be before you can fly back?"

"No. But I'll let you know as soon as I know." That night I had my first ever sleeping pill at the urging of the nurse. It was the last such pill I ever took. I slept, but I felt as though I was half awake and half in a dream the whole night. It was a strange sensation I was in no hurry to replicate. From then on I decided I would just have to tolerate the headache that never stopped. I slept whenever my body could no longer stay awake. It didn't matter to me if this was at night or in the daytime.

After about a week I had more than enough of staring at the four walls and the ceiling. The place was so pristine and freshly painted that there weren't many blemishes to break up the monotonous panorama of my room. Fortunately I had regained enough strength to propel myself in a wheelchair to a tiny common room down the hall where there was a television. In many ways I was grateful to be able to use a wheelchair. Not only did it mean that I didn't have to use too much energy in standing and walking, it also meant that I didn't have to expose my rear end to other patients and nurses. The person who designed hospital gowns should be shot. It seems like they were designed to humiliate patients, to remove the last trace of dignity they may have had. Perhaps it is a less than subtle way for patients to feel

subservient to doctors. It takes a rare individual to retain equality and dignity when their ass is exposed.

It felt like I was in an old age home. Everyone but the staff looked to be at least seventy. I suspected that this part of the hospital doubled as a seniors' home. Nobody spoke to me. The soccer World Cup was on. Ordinarily I would be cheering and getting quite enthusiastic about each match. But cheering now made my head hurt, and it seemed a little frolicsome for the gray brigade I was watching with. They never moved. They may as well have been watching a royal funeral or playing poker. I could only handle sitting up for an hour before I would return to my room. The good news was that there was steady improvement in my condition. There were a few little complications. The veins in my forearms were becoming rigid and were making it increasingly difficult for the nurses to rig up the intravenous for me there. They decided to use a vein on the left side of my neck. This worked well until I developed a huge herpes in that location. Each time the doctor came by I would ask the same question, "Can I go home yet?" His response was always the same, "Not yet." This made for rather tiresome conversations.

Finally, after nearly two weeks the doctor said, "We're going to give you a spinal injection tomorrow to see if your cerebrospinal white blood cell count is low enough for you to leave."

This should have been good news. But I lay in bed and wondered, *What if the white blood cell count is too high for me to go home? What if they make a mistake with the needle? I don't like the idea of someone jabbing me in the spine with a needle.* I still remembered vividly having spinal injections when in the hospital with meningitis at the age of four. This current experience seemed to trigger deeply buried fears from that time of illness as a child.

The next day I was wheeled down to the belly of the hospital for my shot. All went well and there were no complications. I had to wait all afternoon for the results. This was a nerve-wracking time. I felt like a prisoner who had been on death row when the capital punishment law was revoked. I was waiting for the decision of the prison warden to see if I had served enough time.

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Would I have to stay longer in my cell or would I be granted freedom and the opportunity to reunite with my loved ones?

Early in the evening, in that eerie light of the northern summer day, the doctor came to visit me. The smile on his face said it all. "The white blood cell count is low enough. You can go home tomorrow. Congratulations."

"That's great. Thanks," I said, a wave of relief pouring through me.

"No thanks are needed," said the doctor, "You have healed well."

I started to get out of the bed.

"What are you doing?" asked the physician.

"I thought I would pack all my things. Isn't my backpack in that closet beside the bed?"

"John, would you please stay in the bed and rest until you are discharged tomorrow. This has been a serious illness. You have only just survived. Do you know how close to dying you were?"

"No," I said a little sheepishly, getting back under the covers.

"John, you have to rest for at least another five to seven weeks before you can resume an ordinary, active life. If you don't rest enough you could have a headache for the rest of your life." The doctor seemed to be coming on strong but, in fairness, he could see that I was not inclined to remain idle for long. I took his words seriously. After all, I continued to have a raging headache that had hardly abated in two weeks. I was anxious to leave and get on with my life. I felt that this hospital and its mostly unsmiling faces was no longer a healing environment for me. Modern care and allopathic medicine, together with 'angelic' intervention, had saved my life. What I craved now was that greatest of healing forces, love, and I could think of nothing better than to fly home to Canada and stay with my parents until I was healthy enough to resume my travels.

Before leaving the hospital I had a shower for the first time in two weeks. When I dressed in my own clothes I was amazed to see that the clothes had gotten bigger. They were hanging on me. The inactivity and the illness showed in a lack of muscle tone and a huge weight loss. This had sort of crept up on me and I had had no benchmark to see the changes. Now I was more than a little shocked at my appearance. There was an ugly red rash on my

neck from the intravenous and herpes and I had a pale and pasty look. I could see the wisdom of not having a mirror in my room.

I hoisted my pack on my back with not a little difficulty and took the elevator down to the main entrance. As I was about to leave a nurse I didn't recognize approached me, "Oh, hello. I didn't expect to see you again. I was here when you were admitted. We didn't think you were going to make it. Congratulations."

"Thanks," I smiled, genuinely grateful for her words. She was only the second nurse to talk to me in two weeks.

It took all my resolve and physical resources to make the trip to Canada. I flew first to Stockholm and then on to London. I slept in a hotel close to Gatwick and flew directly to Toronto the next morning. My head was pounding and I resorted to pain killers for the flight.

There were other European flights arriving coincidentally with mine so the arrivals lounge at Toronto's Pearson International Airport was jam packed with people. I sat down amongst the throng to rest after dragging my bag through customs and immigration. I was exhausted. The noise of the crowd wasn't sitting well with head. I didn't immediately see my parents.

After about five minutes I saw my father standing above me scanning the crowd, presumably looking for me. "I'm here Dad," I said. He looked down at me and then continued to search for me in the crowded room. I touched his hand, "I'm here Dad."

He looked at me again. Recognition showed on his face. My appearance had obviously changed more dramatically than I thought. My own father didn't initially know who I was. It was only about a month since we had last seen each other. It seemed like a year. I stood up a little shakily and hugged my father. Dad turned and looked above the teeming multitudes for my mother. She worked her way through the crush of the crowd to us. It felt wonderful to feel her embrace. I had been craving physical contact of this sort.

I spent the next three weeks with them in their home on the north shore of Lake Ontario. It was just what I needed: frequent walks in the lakeside air, the sound of birds, the summer warmth, my parents' care. I recovered quickly. The headache waned and then, one day, it was gone.

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My mother and I took another walk through the long grass beside the lake. The killdeer were nesting and singing their distinctive melody that gives them their name. Mom said softly, “We were so concerned when we went to pick you up from the airport. We thought you might be blind or partially deaf. We were so relieved to see you in a remarkably good, if weak, condition.”

Now that I was feeling so much better I made a trip to the library to research meningitis. In a medical text I read that in seventy percent of the cases in which the patient is not treated within 24 hours death follows. Of the thirty percent that survive many have mental difficulties, blindness or associated long-lasting debilitations. I was a lucky man. Twice in my life I’ve had spinal meningitis. Twice I’ve fully recovered. I resumed my activities after three weeks of rest. I have rarely had a headache in all the years since.

As my health steadily improved I looked into resuming my round the world trip. I spoke with my travel agent friend about the least expensive way to get back to London. Then, out of the blue, I received a call from my father’s former boss in the telephone company. He offered me a staff job in Toronto. This would be the kind of work that could prepare me for promotion. This was the kind of job I had hoped to find when I returned from Saudi Arabia in February. It was a generous and timely offer. I was faced with choosing between career and security, or adventure and uncertainty. Which would I choose?

John P. Haines



4

A Close Shave

Ontario, June, 1986.

After that brief but enjoyable recovery period in my parents' home in Wilmot Creek, Ontario, I was anxious to resume my journey of discovery. I turned down the lucrative offer of work in Toronto. There would be other times in my life to earn money. Now I was in search of answers to my questions. What had woken me from my coma in Norway just as I was going to receive a potentially lethal injection? What am I here for? Who am I?

Armed with an around-the-world plane ticket I flew first to London. Here I rendezvoused with a handful of friends from my meningitis shortened tour. They filled me in on the remainder of their trip through Scandinavia and the Communist block countries.

I flew to Thailand and moved by train south to Malaysia where I revisited the island of Penang off the north-west coast. I had previously toured this enchanting isle while on vacation from Saudi Arabia. Penang was established by Francis Light in 1786 as the first British trading post in the Far East. When Light landed, on the site of the present Esplanade, Pulau Penang ('Island of the Betel Nut') was virtually uninhabited and covered in dense vegetation. In order to stimulate Penang's growth, Light decided to allow immigrants to claim whatever land they could clear. Within a few decades, the island had attracted more than 10,000 settlers and traders, including Malays, Sumatrans, Indians, and especially Chinese. Light's attempts to stimulate agriculture on the island were largely unsuccessful, but Penang was soon established as a major trading port for tea, spices, china, and cloth.

The city of Penang is today a bustling metropolitan city in which Eastern and Western influences blend to form a unique culture. After a short visit, a forty minute flight brought me to Medan in Sumatra. I was in Indonesia for the first time.

My energy levels were remarkably good. There was no sign of the headaches the Norwegian doctor had warned could plague me for the rest of my life if I didn't take sufficient rest. I used local transport and followed the well-trodden overland route that brought me to Lake (Danau) Toba. Danau Toba occupies the caldera of a massive volcano that collapsed on itself after an eruption estimated to have occurred 75,000 years ago. The Toba eruption could possibly have been the largest explosive volcanic eruption within the last twenty five million years. The largest eruption in modern times, at Mount Tambora in 1815, emitted the equivalent of around 100 cubic kilometers of dense rock and created the 'Year Without a Summer' as far away as North America. It is estimated by researchers that the Toba 'Event' resulted in 2,000 cubic kilometers of erupted material. To give an idea of its magnitude, consider that although the eruption took place in Indonesia, it deposited an ash layer approximately 15 cm (6 in) thick over the entire Indian subcontinent. Flooding of the crater has produced the largest lake in South East Asia. At an altitude of about 800 meters the air is pleasantly cool. Despite being close to the equator a blanket is sometimes advisable at night.

Over lunch the next day I met a 22-year-old West German, Marc Pierre, who was taking a travel break from literature and political science studies in Bonn. Discussions between us encompassed Buddhism and other Eastern religions and philosophies. I was now open and ready to explore an expansion of ideas. This seemed a natural avenue to follow while traveling in Asia, the original home and heart of Eastern thought. Marc Pierre gave me a list of books to read by German authors. Several of these, including *Siddhartha* and *Steppenwolf*, were by the renowned writer, Herman Hesse. Having luxuriated in the Herman Hesse suite in the Raffles Hotel on an earlier visit to Singapore, I made a mental note to seek out the Hesse books.

After a day of relatively intense and stimulating conversation, Marc Pierre carried on with his travels while I remained behind. It

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was a good place for me to relax, enjoy leisurely walks and further recover my strength. Most of the people who live around Lake Toba are ethnically Bataks. Traditional Batak houses are noted for their distinctive roofs, which curve upwards at each end, as a boat's hull does. I visited some of these homes and the outgoing and friendly Batak inhabitants. Sitting on the adjoining balcony of my room I feasted on the ever changing skies and colors that embraced the panorama of the liquid caldera. It was amazing to think that such a peaceful setting was the site of an explosion of such overwhelming enormousness that it would have caused the death of nearly every plant, animal and human in Asia and created a volcanic winter over the entire planet.

A longish and somewhat uncomfortable bus trip, another reminder that Asian transport is rarely designed for long legged Westerners, brought me to the picturesque city of Bukittingi. The name Bukittingi means 'high hills'. It is an apt moniker as the bustling spot is encircled by pyramidal bush clad tropical volcanoes, some of which are still active. Another cool stop at an elevation of around 900 meters, the city is popular with travelers and a large number of hotels meeting a wide range of budgets have been built to cater to visitors' needs. An extensive search landed me in a reasonably priced and relatively clean guest house. After a refreshing sleep I washed and began to shave in the communal bathroom of the hostel. I looked to my right and there, by the next sink, also engaged in the act of shaving, stood Marc Pierre.

"Good morning," I said perfunctorily.

"Good morning," replied Marc Pierre, looking at me only slightly surprised. Happy to see each other again, we spent the next days together exploring the area. We shopped at a local market with spices piled up looking all the world like yellow, orange and brown volcanoes. We were somewhat depressed by the decrepit state of the inhabitants at a local zoo. On a day tour we saw tropical fruit bats, peeled and tasted the bark of cinnamon bushes, and chanced upon a sort of free for all local bull fight. We watched the latter from the safety of a nearby hill. The distinction between willing participants and enthusiastic spectators blurred, as everyone dodged a runaway bull.

Some of the cultural aspects of Sumatran life impressed me. The Minangkabau people were said to be animistic in their traditional beliefs because they recognized and respected the spirit in the plant, animal and elemental life around them. The Minangkabau society was arranged along matrilineal lines, whereby property and name were passed through the mother, unlike the patriarchal systems that have dominated most societies in the world over at least the last two thousand years. Extended families of several generations shared long, raised houses, each family unit having its own cooking fire. Although many Minangkabau were practicing Muslims, they had, largely due to their relative isolation, resisted the temptations of our pervasive global culture. They continued to lead their traditional, peaceful lives honoring family above all else.

Marc Pierre's travel plans again differed from mine. He was to continue overland south through Sumatra while I was due to meet with a Canadian friend from Saudi Arabia in Singapore. Once again we said goodbye, as I headed off on a winding bus trip through dense, tropical jungle to the modern oil refinery city of Pekanbaru. American petroleum engineers struck oil there shortly before the Second World War and it remains the oil capital of Indonesia.

From here I flew to Singapore. I was astounded by how many charming older buildings had been replaced by modern construction in a few short years. The few remaining older structures were dwarfed and overshadowed by the skyscrapers that Singaporeans were erecting at breakneck speed. Our visit coincided with National Independence Day so we enjoyed some of the annual celebrations along the waterfront with the locals. Jugglers and stilt walkers added color and pizzazz to the ultra modern cityscape.

Travel guidebooks are full of warnings of crime in Jakarta; so after a comfortable flight from Singapore I immediately left the dirty, busy and noisy capital of Indonesia and headed by train for the hill town of Bandung. Situated at 750 meters elevation, the place was blessed with a comfortable climate. My interest in health led me to purchase a foul tasting dried herbal concoction from an elderly healer. I was told that if I ate a little bit of it for one hundred straight days I would be ensured of an unusually long

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life. This may have been pure quackery but I began immediately to ingest a little each day. I never found out the composition of this herbal blend and I was never sure whether it had legitimate healing properties or if it was simply another way to procure a little cash from gullible travelers. The repulsive flavor of this concoction led to my stopping with this daily ritual prior to the stipulated one hundred day threshold. I would have to settle for a moderately long life!

Yogyakarta was the next stop on my journey. Today this city can claim to be the cultural and artistic center of Java. The sprawling metropolis was founded in 1755 when the declining local kingdom fragmented under increasing Dutch intervention. Prince Mangkubumi was granted the Yogyakarta territory and took the title of sultan. A great Indonesian hero, Prince Diponegoro, led a revolt against the Dutch in the Yogya (the local abbreviation) area between 1825 and 1830. In the 1900s Yogya was again an axis of resistance to the Colonial Dutch and after WWII it served as the unofficial capital of a revolution that eventually led to independence.

My first morning shave in my chosen traveler guest house found me glancing to the right to once again see Marc Pierre standing beside me, face lathered and razor in hand! We were not at all the only Westerners traveling through Java at the time and there was a huge range of accommodation to choose from in the city. Fate brought us happily together again and we chose to spend the next days leisurely exploring the enchanting alleys of the nearby Kraton. This palace is a small walled city within a city. Over twenty five thousand people live within the greater Kraton compound. It was a fascinating place to visit. We watched street-side barbers at work and the common ritual of people pulling lice from each others' hair. We visited a bird market and watched appalled as the combatants of a cock fight kicked and sliced each other, spurred on by the cheers of the surrounding gamblers. We chanced upon the strange percussion of gamelan where we sat and listened enthralled. Melodic parts interlocked, divided in such a way that musicians played alternate notes to form the melody line. The pentatonic scale-based music

challenged our auditory versatility and forced us to let go, and embrace sounds new to our known musical milieu.

We observed the craft of batik as skilled artisans developed their unique and creative designs. We each purchased colorful thin cotton trousers. Marc Pierre's were pink and black and mine were yellow and black, each of batik patterns. These seemed fun and strangely appropriate to wear in this exotic tropical place.

A Man is a Diamond

Marc Pierre had heard excellent reports of a guest house in a village called Kaliurang situated on the lower slopes of a nearby volcano, so we went there together. These reports were well founded. Vogel's Homestay was run by Christian Awuy and his family. At our urging Christian, a short, dark haired man with a shy but helpful demeanor, told us a little of his background. He hailed from the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, formerly called the Celebes. As a young man he worked on cargo ships that carried him all over the world. Three times the ships he worked on sank. The third time he found himself floating in a lifejacket for 48 hours in shark infested waters near the Philippines. He had plenty of time to think. He had been 'three times lucky' and decided he should find another, safer line of work. By then he was married to a Javanese girl and her parents suggested he make use of his skill with foreign languages and open up a guest house for travelers.

Thus Vogel's Homestay came into being and what a gem it was in comparison with many nondescript hotels available for travelers throughout Asia. Some mornings you would find the flag of your homeland carved in the butter patty beside your toast. This was a special touch that we appreciated but it initiated lively discussion because Marc Pierre was fond of saying that patriotism was as dangerous to a nation as pride was to an individual. He felt that virtually all the wars fought in Europe had their roots in patriotism.

When it rained, and precipitation was not uncommon on the side of this volcano, it was a treat to listen to old Bing Crosby records. Christian was a quiet, unassuming and compassionate

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man who made every one of us feel personally looked after. He helped in the preparations of those of us who wished to make the midnight to sunup climb to the sulfurous summit of Gunung Merapi (Mountain of Fire). When a traveler was late to return after one such arduous hike Christian personally arranged for and led a successful search party. The unlucky climber had fallen and broken an arm. With Christian's help, he received prompt and professional treatment at a nearby clinic.

There were many up-to-date guide books at the guest house. It was while looking through one of these that I got the urge to visit the prehistoric tribes of Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea. This dream was to grow and define the outline of my travels in the months to come.

We were encouraged to read and contribute to a guestbook of Christian's. The words at the beginning of the book deeply touched and inspired me and were, to the best of my memory:

A man is a diamond whose heart is a mind and whose mind is a heart. All things and all people come to such a man.

Marc Pierre and I were joined on our night time ascent of the volcano by Brett, a young Australian who shared my interest in plants and nature. We didn't actually see many plants on the way up in the dark but we thoroughly enjoyed the lush vegetation of the tropical forest on the descent in the morning. The reason for making the ascent at night was twofold. We escaped the heat of day during the climb and we were rewarded at the top with a stunning sunrise viewed through the sulfurous cloud of the volcano. It was well worth the trip.

A Temple and Trousers

Borobudur is an amazing pyramidal complex of 108 carved stone Buddhas and a total of 432 Buddha images. It is located forty kilometers north-west of Yogyakarta and receives perhaps one million visitors a year. Marc Pierre and I decided to catch an early bus so that we could experience a sunrise at this sacred place, and

coincidentally avoid the crowds.

The colossal Borobudur Temple was built by the Sailendra dynasty between AD 750 and 842, 300 years before Cambodia's Angkor Wat, and fully 400 years before work began on the great European cathedrals. Little is known about its early history except that a huge workforce—sculptors, plasterers, masons, painters—must have been employed in the tropical heat to shift and carve the approximately 60,000 cubic meters of local river rock used in the construction of the structure. No mortar was used, just fine craftsmanship employing knobs, indentations and dovetail joints.

Scholars think that this massive monument is actually a gigantic textbook for illiterate Buddhists. As they performed their pilgrimage and circumambulated the monument, they passed walls ornamented with reliefs illustrating the life of the Buddha and the principles of his teachings. Recent research indicates that a lake existed in the area as recently as between the 12th and 14th centuries, validating the earlier supposition that Borobudur was built as an aquatic lotus symbol, seen floating on the adjoining lake.

For centuries, Borobudur lay hidden under layers of volcanic ash and jungle growth. The facts behind the desertion of this magnificent monument remain a mystery, but one current theory is that a famine caused by an eruption of nearby Mount Merapi circa AD 1006 forced the inhabitants of Central Java to leave their lands and monuments behind in search of new places to live.

In the 18th century only the uppermost terraces were partly discernable. Dutch colonials on their way to the Javanese court passed other monuments, but no mention was made of Borobudur. Borobudur was rediscovered in 1814 by Lieutenant-Governor Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (of *Rafflesia* and Raffles Hotel fame) during the English occupation of the island at the time of the Anglo-Dutch Java War. During his visit in Semarang, he received a report indicating the discovery of a hill full of many carved stones. The Dutchman H.C. Cornelius was dispatched into the area to investigate; Cornelius spent a month and a half with 200 men conducting a preliminary clearing of the monument. This work of clearing continued for decades, while international appreciation for the site developed slowly, though reliefs,

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Buddhas, and ornaments were routinely removed by thieves and souvenir hunters throughout the nineteenth century.

Borobudur is built on a hill, and tropical rains cause the site to function as a sponge, resulting in the stupa's collapse over the centuries of its existence. Complete disassembly, strengthening of the hill, and reconstruction appeared to be the only solution. From 1973-1984 this massive restoration was carried out under the guidance and financing of UNESCO. The monument has since been listed as one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites.

Marc Pierre and I hadn't counted on the temple enclosure being locked up for the night. Undaunted, we climbed a fence. I got a huge tear from the crotch to the knee in my yellow and black batik pants as I leapt over.

Marc Pierre laughed. "Remember our philosophical talk, John? It must be karma that you tore your pants."

"It's a small price to pay. Look at this." We were enveloped in a thick, soupy mist. As the rising sun hit the temple, the mist became a brilliant orange, punctuated by the dark silhouettes of the remarkable stone Buddhas, a mystical bas relief. We sat mesmerized and drenched in pulsating feelings of peace as the sun rose further and quickly burned off the mist, revealing the skilled and intricate workmanship that went into the carving of the seated holy men.

It wasn't long before the first tourist buses arrived and the gates were opened. We slipped out discreetly as the buses disgorged their occupants, who swarmed over the temple, like ants over a honey pot. We sat quietly beside each other on the public bus back to Yogyakarta. I turned to Marc Pierre and asked, "Do you know the expression: 'The early bird catches the worm'?"

"Yes," he said. "We just caught it, didn't we?"

We sure did, I thought. *We sure did*.

Our paths soon diverged as we continued our respective overland journeys through Java's volcanic landscape on the way to Bali. I think we each reveled in and were nourished by this traveling life where each day represented a new adventure of discovery in which we were free to go with the flow of events that unfolded. I met travelers from many countries along the way. We

shared our experiences, our books, our music and our ideas. We shared meals and sometimes a room.

One such traveler was Glen, a blonde six foot eight inch Albertan. He and I shared rooms in Kuta Beach and Ubud in Bali. Ubud was a sleepy town made up of quite a number of guest houses and restaurants on its two intersecting roads. It was a center of art with nearby villages specializing in woodcarving and jewelry-making. The morning excitement consisted of an elderly man leading his ducks along the dirt lane through the middle of town. At the end of this lane could be found the Monkey Forest Sanctuary, home of cheeky primates demanding peanuts and snatching purses, cameras and sunglasses.

It seemed that every day there was some ceremony or celebration in a neighboring village. The Balinese interpretation of Hinduism is rich and highly developed. From an early age children are immersed in the preparation and celebration of an endless stream of rituals. These same children are encouraged to master some art such as painting or dance. This makes for an incredibly talented and creative culture. Balinese priests periodically perform rites not only for the benefit of their own island but for the purification of the entire planet. They used to do this particular ritual approximately once in a hundred years. But the last century's escalation in worldwide violence and environmental destruction has meant that the Balinese priests have been much busier of late. Perhaps we should periodically reflect on and offer thanks for the unpaid and unsung behind-the-scenes work done by people such as the Hopis, Tibetans and Balinese to keep this world in balance.

To close our time in Bali, Glen and I decided to relax in the sleepy beachside fishing village of Candi Dasa, known for its picturesque and often spectacular sunsets. It was a lazy and restful time of swimming, sunbathing and meals shared with other travelers. Life abounds in the tropics. We found an earthworm, cooked, in one of our vegetarian meals, and a rat scooted across our shoulders during an otherwise enchanting, candlelit dinner. While taking photos of some Westerners playing football with a group of young Balinese boys on the beach, silhouetted against the backdrop of a flaring sunset I recognized one of the Westerners. It was Marc Pierre!

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We spoke that night only. He was about to take a boat to Lombok, the next major inhabited island in this vast, curving Indonesian archipelago of over 13,000 islands. He told me that he was then going to head on to Australia where he had some family and friends to visit. We joked that we would probably see each other there. Little did we know.

I had thoroughly enjoyed my time in Indonesia. My health had held up remarkably well and I had managed to learn a little Bahasa Indonesia, the purpose-made Malay-based tongue designed to linguistically unite this hugely diverse island nation. Almost 6,000 of the islands in the archipelago are inhabited and numerous languages are spoken. Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim nation. I was deeply affected by the unique beauty of the land, the richness of the culture and the genuine friendliness of the people. I had only been on three islands, Sumatra, Java and Bali, but I had been given a taste of just how diverse this country is. It was time to move on and so I flew to Sydney.

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5

A Land Down Under

The oldest and largest Australian city, Sydney, was established as a British penal settlement with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. Like other major Australian cities, Sydney has been transformed by migration. While it remains true that most 'Sydneyiders', as they are called, are of British and Irish descent, Sydney has Australia's largest concentration of Lebanese, Vietnamese and Italian and a vast collage of other ethnicities from around the globe. The city's mix of cultures together with its eclectic array of architecture spanning huge skyscrapers and stately renovated Victorian structures reminded me of Toronto.

I was ready for a little break from travel. A brief stay in a Youth Hostel near the airport put me in contact with a young New Zealander who got me a job with him in Sydney's thriving fish market. Our work, five days a week, was to prepare previously filleted fish for cat food. This involved sorting the fish, lifting heavy crates in and out of the freezers, and cutting the heads off overly toothsome varieties. We wore two sets of gloves and large overalls but, needless to say, by the end of the day one smelt rather fishy. By now I was staying with Neville and Lorna, the parents of Brett, whom I had met on that exciting walk up Gunung Merapi. They lived in an expansive bungalow in the Sydney suburb of East Hills. I stayed in Brett's old room. It was still filled with the trappings of youth. Displays of Brett's butterfly collection were juxtaposed with posters of rugby stars.

Getting home from work involved a bus trip from the fish market, a walk through downtown Sydney and a train journey to East Hills. No matter how busy the bus or train was I always

found I sat with plenty of space around me. There are advantages to working with fish.

It was during one of these aromatic (I provided the fragrance) after work walks to Sydney's central train station that I was greeted with a "How ya doing sailor?" by a familiar smiling face. He had obviously noticed my eau de cologne. Believe it or not Marc Pierre and I had met again! What was it that orchestrated these serendipitous meetings between Marc Pierre and me? Again, we decided to spend time together while we both remained in the Sydney area. He was staying with friends of his family downtown, so I would sometimes drop in for a visit after a day's work in the fish market.

I found another job working as a cleaner for a helicopter company in a suburb not far from Neville and Lorna's home. I could commute to and from work by bicycle. It was October by now and springtime in New South Wales. Neville harvested mulberries from the garden for an occasional extra special dessert. Temperatures were in the 70s (Fahrenheit) and it was almost always sunny. Marc Pierre bought a bus ticket that allowed multiple stopovers throughout the country and he headed up to Queensland. I settled into a comfortable life with Neville and Lorna. They took me to a local nature reserve, suggested excellent reading from the library about Australia including Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country*, and one weekend we met Brett at their vacation home up the New South Wales coast. Brett surfed and I watched the play of a pod of dolphins.

Springtime also means the native magpies, like other birds, are nesting, and the males can be particularly protective and aggressive, swooping down on schoolchildren and others who are in the vicinity of their nests. Children have been known to hold cardboard boxes over their heads when walking to and from school in the spring. Twice each day, going to and returning from work, I was attacked by a male magpie, who somehow managed to surprise me with a gallant swoop at my head each time. He didn't dive when I was looking, so I took to riding with my reflective sunglasses on the back of my head. My fine feathered aggressor soon caught on to that ploy, so I began wearing a red plastic fireman's helmet, a child's prize from a well known fast

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food restaurant, to protect my head. It worked, although I must say I received some interesting looks from passers-by.

One weekend Neville, Brett, some friends and I made a canoe trip inland from Sydney. Water levels were low and we periodically had to run through white water and work the paddles quickly to avoid hitting rocks. One of the canoes got punctured during a close encounter with a sharp rock, and the boys showed their skill at repairing fiberglass. I noticed that the passage of time had removed any fear I had once had after a waterfall mishap many years before. I paddled confidently and fearlessly, and enjoyed the arboreal atmosphere created by the overhanging gum trees. I saw my first and only platypus. These shy creatures are one of nature's throwbacks, being egg-laying mammals with webbed feet and duck-like bills. I wondered how Darwin would have explained these strange, furry mammals.

My cleaning job had grown quickly to encompass gardening and sign painting. When it came time to leave I was gifted a flight in a helicopter and the boss offered to train me in helicopter maintenance if I stayed on. I turned him down, anxious to experience more of Australia.

So it was on November eleventh that Neville and Lorna drove me to the outskirts of Sydney on the southbound motorway. I didn't have to hitchhike long before I was picked by a group of people who had chartered a bus to visit the Remembrance Day Monument in Canberra.

The rare overcast weather added to the somber atmosphere as we walked around reading about the travesty at Gallipoli and seeing the names of all the soldiers who had given their lives in the wars. Neville had been imprisoned by the Japanese in Singapore and his memories from that time were far from pleasant. Perhaps that is one of the reasons Neville joined a friend each week at his local RSA (Returned and Services' Association) club.

Dumpster Dipping

After bidding the Remembrance Day people farewell I resumed hitchhiking, eventually landing in Melbourne, where I stayed with Maree, an ebullient friend from my Scandinavian tour days. I purchased a tent because I had been caught out one night along the way; and eventually found myself in a car with an East German/Lithuanian couple and their primary school aged daughter.

During the long drive we were so enjoying each other's company that this young girl, Zoë, spontaneously asked her mother and father, "Can John stay with us when we get home?" Her parents were caught off guard but acquiesced to Zoë's suggestion. The next two nights found me snoozing comfortably in my sleeping bag on the carpeted floor of a spare room. They lived in a beautiful stone u-shaped bungalow with swimming pool in an up market suburb of Adelaide called Sky, aptly named as it sat high on a hilltop overlooking the city.

Over a pleasant meal Rainer told the story of how he had been living and working at an American military base in Germany many years before. One evening he was out for a walk when he couldn't help but notice a pair of legs dangling over the edge of a large steel waste container. He pulled on the legs and out popped a middle aged woman holding an unopened package of bread. He asked her what she was doing and she told him that she regularly raided the container for the masses of unused and technically outdated food that was being thrown out on a daily basis. Rainer was surprised and touched by her story, and he too began to make frequent collections of what he called 'perfectly good food' from waste containers.

Upon immigrating to Australia with Ilse, Rainer found that similar wasteful practices were widespread in 'The Land Down Under'. Before going to bed Rainer asked me, "John, would you like to join me tomorrow and I'll show you just what I'm doing about this?"

Always game for something new I replied, "Sure."

The next morning Rainer donned a pair of overalls and took me on one of his regular 'tours' of supermarket dumpsters. He

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explained to me that supermarket managers and staff were not always pleased to see him hoist his large frame into the waste bins, but he only visited containers placed on public land adjacent to store property. The store employees could not legally stop him, or anyone else, from searching such publicly accessible bins.

I jumped around doing my best to catch and direct into the back of the car the tremendous number of boxes of muesli bars, fresh fruit and vegetables, packaged meat and perfectly good non-food items that catapulted from the container, Rainer would periodically emerge from the rubbish he was rummaging through with another prize held aloft and exclaim, "Can you believe this?" or "Nothing wrong with this."

As our tour continued, Rainer explained what he did with all this stuff, which was obviously more than his family could eat or use.

"Most goes to a variety of charities that are only too happy to receive whatever is given. We also give some to the neighbors, and we store at home items that we know, from experience, will last longer."

We completed our morning adventure by delivering most of what we had gathered to a center for rehabilitating prisoners. Everything was enthusiastically received.

Over an extended period of time Rainer had been doing his diplomatic best to convince the supermarkets to give some things, which were currently being thrown out, directly to the charities themselves. He had met with much resistance so he was now having a television documentary prepared. He had told supermarket representatives that if they didn't change their practices within a specified and fair time period, he would feel obligated to have the documentary aired on Australian National Television. Later, in Queensland, after the completion of my Australian travels, and a stay of four-and-a-half months in New Zealand, I met people who had seen the documentary. I wondered if it had produced the desired result.

Adelaide is South Australia's capital and it boasts a 'Mediterranean-like' climate, a magnificent location surrounded by rolling hills and dales, beaches on Gulf St. Vincent, broad boulevards and elegant architecture. I caught a bus into the center of town to do a little exploring. While wandering around the

pedestrian-only Rundle Mall shopping promenade, I was almost not surprised to run into Marc Pierre once again. How many times had this happened? Over an afternoon snack at a local restaurant, we caught up on each others' experiences since he had left Sydney over a month before. When I explained that I planned to cross the Nullarbar Plain to reach the gold mining town of Kalgoorlie, he said, "If you get a chance please go to Coober Pedy. It is on the on the road through Australia's hot center that eventually reaches Alice Springs. Coober Pedy is a fascinating opal mining community where people live underground in houses tunneled from sandstone to escape the outrageous heat." Marc Pierre explained that he had stopped off at Coober Pedy on the way down from Alice Springs by bus. I explained that I would consider his advice, but Coober Pedy was quite literally hundreds of kilometers off my route that headed west, rather than north, from Adelaide.

We didn't have time for a long visit. Marc Pierre was catching a bus that very afternoon on his way back to Sydney for a flight that was due to depart for Auckland, New Zealand within a week.

Before we parted I said to him, "Look. This is almost unbelievable how often we have bumped into each other without trying. Here's the phone number of friends in Wellington I'll be staying with beginning just before Christmas. When you get to Wellington, give us a call and we'll get together."

He smiled and said, "I'll do my best."

The next morning I too had to smile when I asked the young man who had pulled over in his older, somewhat dilapidated car to give me a lift, where he was headed.

He replied, "Coober Pedy, mate."

I ended up staying in the underground home of him and his partner for the next week as I thoroughly explored the extraordinary multinational and unusual population of the opal mining town with a cast of characters that included a man called Crocodile Harry. But that is another story.

Weeks later I was hitchhiking from Auckland, my port of entry into New Zealand, down to Wellington, the country's capital. When I eventually reached Paraparaumu, a seaside resort looking

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out on the nature reserve of Kapiti Island, the driver of my last lift said, "The twisting two-laned coast-hugging road from here to Wellington is not a good place for hitchhiking. I suggest you take the train for this last part of your trip." I gladly accepted his advice and called my dear friend Geoff after I arrived in Wellington's Central Station. When he and his wife Vi arrived, we placed my backpack in the boot ('trunk' to North Americans) and proceeded into traffic for the twenty minute drive to Geoff and Vi's home in the suburb of Johnsonville.

We were still downtown, and hadn't been driving more than a couple of minutes, when I yelled out, "Geoff, Stop the car! Stop the car!"

There, walking along the footpath, was Marc Pierre. He smiled as we pulled over and asked, "Are you Geoff and Vi?"

They mutely nodded, both looking a little shocked. Marc Pierre continued, "I just called your phone number but there was no answer. Now I know why." He climbed nonchalantly into the car before we drove to Geoff and Vi's bungalow. Marc Pierre stayed with us for a couple of pleasant days and engaged us in several spirited discussions about the meaning of life, before carrying on with his travels. He had several more islands in the South Pacific to visit.

Thus ends the saga of how Marc Pierre and I 'coincidentally' met on three different islands in Indonesia and in Australia and New Zealand. The Gods are not just crazy; they have a bizarre sense of humor.

In the course of my four-and-a-half months in New Zealand I tramped on the North and South Islands, visited an offshore island sanctuary accompanying a bird scientist studying the rare Little Spotted Kiwi and took a mountaineering course in the Southern Alps. I grew to love this country of exquisite natural beauty and friendly, extraordinarily helpful and unaffected people. I loved it so much that I bought a bungalow in Wellington and set to painting and fixing up the three bedroom house before renting it out. One morning, while walking to the bungalow, I passed the Beehive, New Zealand's home for Members of Parliament. A large man in jacket and tie walked past and exchanged pleasantries. It was David Lange, the country's Prime Minister. He was walking alone, clearly enjoying the early sunshine on his

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way to work. In what other Occidental land would one meet the country's leader, unencumbered by security, on a footpath?

My time in Wellington was up. I thumbbed lifts north to Auckland and jumped on a freighter bound for Sydney. There I reunited with Neville and Lorna before setting off for Queensland, hitchhiking.



6

In the Shade of a Gum Tree

Queensland, May, 1987.

Standing on the roadside north of McKay with the morning Queensland sun already burning everything and everyone in its path, I felt content and confident, in my element. Many had warned me that this stretch of road was notoriously difficult to hitch. A story floated around of a gruesome murder involving a hitchhiker some years back. It had taken me an hour to walk to this point from the hostel beside the river in town. Ugly rectangular industrial buildings had given way to sprawling and distinctive Queenslander bungalows with their wraparound verandas, raised high on pylons to escape flooding, ants and vermin. The land here, past the edge of town, was flat and open, and vision was impaired by the ubiquitous fields of sugar cane, hectare after hectare, tall green stalks swaying in the gentle breeze, Australia's version of North America's millions of acres of corn.

Traffic was light but steady. No one was stopping. It looked like it was going to be a long day.

I wasn't concerned. I had had nothing but excellent experiences hitchhiking. It was a part of travel that left me feeling comfortably vulnerable and completely open to the unknown.

My thoughts float back to the ride I share with the speedway motorcycle racer, his dog and the young Australian hitchhiker returning east across the Nullarbar Desert—three long, endless days of driving interspersed

with Bob's fascinating accounts of his life on the road. Australia seems to spawn these adventurous, independent characters, like modern day swagmen, wandering and exploring this massive continent, or settled in remote backwaters and leading exotic and eccentric lives like Crocodile Harry in Coober Pedy. Some claim the movie character, Crocodile Dundee, was roughly based on his life.

At the end of each interminable day of driving Bob pulls the van and trailer off the Nullarbar Highway. We scavenge enough dead mulga scrub for a fire, boil a billy for tea and eat a simple meal. Then we stretch out in our sleeping bags on the rough ground and feast our night eyes on the celestial festival of twinkling lights. What expansive skies and what quiet! Just the silent glittering of innumerable stars, in a vast, infinite, ink black canopy, casting their magic on three men, a dog, and the dying embers of a fire. I feel at peace lying there in that endless desert with my new friends, my brothers for a few days.

Independent travel does that, bringing temporarily together these wandering ships that would otherwise pass in the night. Relationships are mostly brief and sometimes downright fleeting. The barriers and masks of settled existence melt away, allowing strangers to become fast friends, if only for a day. We travelers need that, having deliberately stepped away from the social safety net of family, school, work and community.

Midday approached and the sun neared its zenith. I decided to walk further. I set my sights on a huge roadside gum in the distance, yearning for its welcome shade. The rumors of difficult hitchhiking in this area seemed to be true. I continued to turn and face the passing cars, smiling, knowing that my ride would come; if not today, then tomorrow. Not to worry. I had a tent and a portable gas cooker. I'd only have to find some water somewhere. In this hot, dry climate water was vital. I had heard stories of cars breaking down in the desert and their passengers dying of thirst. For now, my water stores were sufficient and I was bee-lining for midday shade.

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Two brothers in their late forties pick me up south of Auckland on a Friday afternoon in December. These friendly men are escaping the city and their wives for a couple of days of quiet and fishing on the shores of Lake Taupo, the gigantic water-filled caldera in the center of New Zealand's North Island. They invite me for a meal and put me up for the night in their waterside cabin, which they call a 'bach'.

Each of these men is happily married; this is simply an opportunity to renew their brotherly relationship and to rest from the responsibilities of everyday life.

I enjoy a walk along the lakeside, picking up porous rounded bits of pumice, a reminder of the lake's volcanic origins. I stop and watch intently as the horizon turns first to vermillion, then to orange, and later fades to lavender and gray. I turn and find the path back to their cabin before darkness and the mosquitoes arrive. The next morning one of the brothers goes out of his way to drive me around the lake to a spot on the main road where I continue hitching to Wellington.

I loved this wandering life where every day was an unknown adventure. I loved standing or walking on the roadside and opening myself to people's goodwill, which came in so many forms.

A few days before I am picked up on the outskirts of Sydney by a young man in a battered Holden. He tells me he's on his way to visit friends in Brisbane, seven or eight hours up the road.

"Where ya headed, mate?" he asks me, cracking open a beer.

"North, Cairns eventually, and then on to Papua New Guinea," I reply.

"Watch out fer them black fellas, head hunters still, I hear," he warns. "Hey, do ya want a beer?"

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"No thanks. I don't drink," I inform him. We slip into casual conversation. After a few hours of driving he pulls off the road.

"Come on. I'll shout ya lunch," he offers.

We enter the bowels of a pub, dark even after our sun-drenched eyes adjust to the interior. There is a sign with XXXX over the door, one of Australia's favorite beers. Like beer drinkers the world over, Aussies are fiercely loyal to their favorite brand.

I sit down beside Mike at the bar, sparsely populated with a few middle-aged, potbellied men, drinking XXXX. Mike orders a beer for himself and a soda drink for me. We eat some sandwiches and, to my chagrin, Mike buys more beer for the road. We step from the gloom of the pub into the blinding sunlight. He hands me the car keys and asks, "Would you like to drive?"

"Sure," I say, relieved.

He lounges in the passenger seat, downing beer. He's sound asleep when I drive into Brisbane at dusk.

Throughout Australia I had received warnings from well-meaning acquaintances:

"Papua New Guinea's dangerous, mate. Be careful."

"I think you're making a big mistake going to PNG. The natives are primitive, and some are head hunters."

"You better not hitch the Nullarbar. People have disappeared there."

This last warning was from a policeman in Sydney. My own experience was the antithesis of the dire warnings. The average Australian lives in a big, modern city of concrete, glass and steel, yet most of Australia is a massive desert wilderness, interspersed with huge, remote cattle and sheep stations. Perhaps the city dweller's views are colored more by the media than by experience. The occasional murder is front page news. Outside the noise, congestion and familiarity of the city lies a vast, largely uninhabited, unknown and, therefore, scary place.

For me the unknown wasn't frightening. For me, the unknown meant freedom and the refreshing opportunity for new experience.

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In the shade of this lone gum tree on the side of the Bruce Highway north of McKay I stood in anticipation of a delicious and mysterious encounter. I would meet someone new, a fellow human being with interesting anecdotes from a life dramatically different from mine. If I chose to listen, their life and its incumbent stories would flow over me and through me, like a novel contained in a waterfall, drenching and cleansing and filling me with a wealth of events; awakening new possibilities and dreamings in my own developing future. All I had to do was wait, and then listen and share a few joyful moments of life with a newfound friend. After all 'strangers are friends we haven't met.'

True wealth is not knowing what is coming, but knowing that it's good.

"Been waitin' long?" called the driver of the late model sedan as the window whirled down electrically. I was pulled from my reverie.

"Long enough. I've been waiting all day for you," I replied, picking up my backpack.

"Hop in."

After carefully stowing my pack in the backseat I climbed into the spare seat in the front beside my benefactor. He asked about me and I complied with a brief summary of my travels and my plans.

"You're in luck. I'm driving to Townsville. We should be there by nightfall. In Townsville, at the harbor, you can ask about any ships going to Papua New Guinea."

He told me about his wife and children and their comfortable existence in a Melbourne suburb. He told me too, of the racism that he, as a son of Greek immigrants, had been subjected to. He told me of his dreams to travel. He was a small business owner and this was a work-related trip. He had intentionally chosen to drive rather than fly. He wanted to feel and touch his beautiful country. He shared his love of Australia with me and in a short while a kinship grew between us.

We pulled into Townsville just as the sky was beginning to color. He drove to a modern hotel.

"Tonight's on me," he smiled genially.

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The spotless room had two double beds. I showered, changed into my best clothes, and we enjoyed a meal in the hotel restaurant.

“Townsville has a new casino. If you are OK with that I’d like to take you there.”

We drove down to the harbor where a new, expansive, Vegas-like hotel and casino cast their seductive light onto a palm-fringed swimming pool and the nearby sea. Cars streamed into the massive parking area. I spent the evening playing blackjack and observing the workings of a Queensland gambling hall. I couldn’t help but wonder at a life that took me from the shade of a roadside gum tree to the opulence of a casino, all in one day.



7

*Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need,
but not every man's greed.*

Mahatma Gandhi 1869 – 1948

Mark—A Simple Tree Planter

The next afternoon found me sitting by the juice bar at a quiet outdoor mall in central Townsville at the mercy of a loquacious elderly visitor. Aside from this one-eyed WWII story-telling veteran and an occasional shopper purchasing a juice or fruit salad, I was almost on my own. It was a pleasant, warm environment in which to read.

There were, however, two men seated on a nearby bench. They had been there when I arrived. Now, after listening intently to my visitor's stories for more than half an hour, I looked up to see that they were still there.

They were dressed to suit the tropical climate. The youngest man, a tall, slim western European in his early twenties wore sandals, shorts and T shirt. The other man's appearance grabbed my attention. He looked to be in his mid thirties. He wore only sandals and shorts. He spoke with an American accent. He was deeply tanned and his pleasant face gave the appearance of someone who spent a lot of time outside, weathered but content. The two men sat with palm fronds on their laps and the older of the two was teaching his younger protégé how to weave grasshoppers with the fronds.

"Where did you meet the old man?" The question was directed

at me by the shirtless man.

"Here," I replied. "He just sat down here of his own accord."

He smiled, "That was very patient of you to listen to him for so long."

"I've got the time," I said. "Besides, I found his stories of the cruelty of the Japanese in the Second World War interesting. He lost his eye in a prisoner of war camp."

"What are you reading?" he probed.

"Fritjof Capra's *The Turning Point*," I told him. "I also have *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert Pirsig."

"From the library?"

"Yes."

That seemed to satisfy his curiosity. He returned to his frond weaving and I resumed my reading.

An hour passed. A winsome long haired, barefoot woman arrived pushing a small, wheeled, obviously hand made, wooden cart, similar in size and shape to the ice-cream trolleys sometimes seen in cities.

"Mark, look at the canned food I received today." Her enthusiastic words were aimed at the shirtless man. She opened up one of the doors on the cart. Two shelves were brimming with canned vegetables.

"That's great Sal. We won't go hungry tonight," replied the man.

"I'll be back shortly," said Sal. She headed away in the direction from which she had come, leaving the cart behind.

Intrigued, I asked, "It's Mark, isn't it? Is that all you own?"

"Yes," he replied. He seemed to be thinking. After a few seconds he asked me, "Have you got a little more time? If so, I'll tell you my story—the brief version." He laughed. So did I.

"Go ahead," I said. I was definitely interested.

Mark began, "Seven years ago I flew out to Sydney from America on a vacation, a badly needed one. I was experiencing burnout from my job as an advertising account executive.

"I decided to go to the business and economics department in the university in Sydney. I asked each of the professors there what was at the root of the Western world's love affair with buying, with materialism. Without exception every one of these professors felt that advertising was the culprit. After all, advertising is

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designed to create ‘perceived needs’ for objects and services we don’t really need.”

I nodded my head in confirmation. I had indeed studied this in marketing classes at university.

Mark sighed and then continued in his calm, laid back way, “I walked out of the university with a deep sense of guilt and remorse. Something clicked in my brain and I decided then and there to take a course of action there was no turning back from. I called my parents and my employer and told them I wasn’t coming back. I tore up my passport, stopped using my last name, and for the last seven years I’ve been slowly making my way up the east coast of Australia on foot, planting trees.” Mark paused and then said with a smile, “That’s the brief version of my story. I’ve been in Townsville for a few weeks. I’m waiting for a shipment of trees from a friend who runs a nursery.”

“So that is all you’ve done for seven years?” I asked, just a little incredulously.

“That’s right. Apart from weaving grasshoppers and other creatures from palm fronds to earn a little money,” he replied, chuckling.

That evening, at Mark’s request, I joined him and his partner, Sal, at a nearby park after dinner. I had been thinking about what Mark had told me. I had more questions I wanted to ask him. Soft tropical breezes wafted in off the sea. Frogs began their sunset chorus. I could almost imagine trying a lifestyle like Mark’s in an environment like this.

“Are you planning to carry on with your present way of life, Mark?” I asked. “Don’t you ever have doubts?”

“Oh, it’s not always easy. My mother doesn’t understand and would love it if I returned to America to visit. But I can’t since I don’t have a passport anymore. I’m doing my best to live at need level,” said Mark with, perhaps, a hint of sadness or resignation in his voice.

“Living at need level. That sounds like Gandhi,” I interjected.

“As a matter of fact, Mahatma Gandhi is one of my three heroes, one of the three people I look to for inspiration.”

“Who are the others?” I asked.

"First there is Jesus. He led a simple life. But in my eyes he made one critical error."

"What was that?"

"He made the mistake of choosing one disciple who betrayed him," Mark laughed and paused to see the effect of his words on me. He turned and smiled at Sal. She smiled back. She seemed content to listen to a story she had probably heard countless times before.

Mark continued, "Gandhi has been inspiring but I think he was too political." He chuckled again and paused to let his words sink in.

"Johnny Appleseed remains my purest inspiration."

"I've heard the name. Who was he?" I asked.

"He was born John Chapman in Massachusetts in the late 1700s, just before America's founding as an independent nation.

"Contrary to many popular versions of his story, Johnny Appleseed planted nurseries rather than randomly spreading apple seeds. But all his trees began from seeds. He considered grafting to be an abomination. He never married and he never settled, preferring an itinerant life of voluntary poverty.

"Johnny dressed in the worst of the used clothing he received, preferring to give away the better clothing in barter. He wore no shoes, even in the snowy winters, and he was always ready to lend a helping hand to those in need, for he didn't have a house of his own to look after."

"I'm beginning to understand the inspiration you've received from Johnny Appleseed and the lifestyle choices you've made, Mark. Are you able to live up to his standards?"

"Life's a journey and there's always learning to be done. Johnny Appleseed was incredibly compassionate. There's a story of him lying by a fire on a cool autumn night. He saw that mosquitoes were flying into the blaze and being burnt. So he doused the fire. He couldn't bear to see something suffer, to give him comfort. I can only try to live by such an example."

Mark finished his explanation, "Many a pioneer was grateful for the apples planted by Johnny Appleseed when other food was scarce in what was then the frontier east of the Mississippi. The man became a legend. He remains a great inspiration to me."

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Mark remains a great inspiration to me—seeking nothing for himself, turning his back on a life of materialism, inspiring others through his simple, living example. He found a cause greater than his own personal wants and needs.

I sometimes wonder if Mark still wanders around Australia, planting trees and the seeds of an alternative perspective on life.

How many others have been inspired by his example? How many callow saplings of simplicity struggle for light in the crowded forest of consumerism? Will these young trees hold forth and become forest giants in a mature glade of expanded awareness?

Just as a sculpture that is years in the making can be destroyed by the single swing of a hammer, so can a lifetime of beliefs be reversed by one life-changing event or by one chance encounter. In meeting Mark I felt as though the rigid sculpture of beliefs I had carried until then had been chipped and was ready to shatter. In doing so it created space for me to build a new, more pliable, gentler way of looking at and interacting with the world.

Until I stopped working and began these travels, I was intent on accumulating more and greater wealth. I hadn't really considered how much was enough, and how much was too much. There is a fine line between sufficiency and over-abundance.

Cairns Here I Come

The next day dawned hot and humid. There was little doubt that I was in the tropics now. An unsuccessful trip to the harbor master left me with the certainty that I must head on to Cairns if I was to find a ship or sailboat to transport me to PNG.

The hostel owner kindly dropped me off on the north side of town and I was once again in the familiar position of relying on the generosity and open heartedness of others to make it to my next port of call. I didn't have to wait long before a van pulled up with three kayaks strapped to the roof.

“Where ya headed?”

“Cairns.”

“In a hurry?”

“No.”

“Jump in if you want a little side tour.”

We were off to a place in the rainforest roughly in the direction of Cairns. I spent a pleasant morning with these three intrepid Aussies as I used one of their cameras to photograph them running rapids on a river overhung with lianas and tree ferns. What a dramatic contrast to the quadrilateral fields of cane I had grown accustomed to seeing.

Later in the day they dropped me off at the highway before returning to Townsville. The youngest and smallest of the men, Colin, handed me a slip of paper and said, “Here’s my phone number at work. If you are unsuccessful in Cairns I may be able to get you on a ship in Townsville.”

“Thanks,” I replied, genuinely grateful for the gesture, but not believing at the time that I would take him up on it.

In Cairns I became fast friends with two of my roommates in an unassuming guest house. Chris was a slightly pudgy blonde Californian with the ability to make anyone laugh. He was spending his last days in Australia after assisting one of the American entries in the recently completed America’s Cup yacht race off Fremantle in Western Australia. There he put his technical camera skills to use, skills he had developed over the years working on films such as *Star Wars* with George Lucas Studios. Chris regaled Tom, my new English friend, and me with humorous and poignant behind-the-scene Hollywood stories. With Chris I took a narrow gauge railway trip to Kuranda, inland in the Atherton Tablelands. This was a distinctive little town with a market offering a bounty of unusual fruits and handicrafts. With Tom I went one night for a free meal at the local Hari Krishna Temple. This was my first encounter with Westerners who had so readily adapted an Eastern way of life. The meal was excellent. I returned early the next morning to chant with these people. I found it a little disconcerting to see all the men on one side of the room and the women on the other side, after they had completed elaborate preparations for a breakfast feast. These people loved to eat. This was my introduction to Sanskrit chants and I must say it felt comfortable and strangely familiar. But I didn’t return because

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I could feel the less than subtle pressure exerted by a couple of the men to join their cult.

Tom, who was raised in a Seventh Day Adventist family, asked me to join him one night for a lecture. We joined with a couple of hundred other people in a school gymnasium for a talk given by a middle-aged couple who had formerly been Jehovah's Witnesses. Their story was compelling. They spoke of the difficulty of leaving the church once they had joined. They also spoke of the claims that were made every few years that the world was coming to an end and only the followers of this faith would be saved. Each time one of these pronouncements was made avid followers took it at face value and sold everything they owned in preparation for the blessed hereafter. Many of these followers found themselves confused if not destitute when they woke up the next day to find the world still ticking along. I left the talk with ambivalent feelings. I'm sure this faith, just like that of the Hari Krishnas, was a balm for some, but I was determined to tread my own path.

*This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

William Shakespeare 1564 – 1616

Chris assured me repeatedly that through his Fremantle contacts he could find me a yacht in Cairns on which I could crew my way to PNG. However, in the course of a week nothing eventuated. I decided, finally, to take up the offer of the kayaker, Colin. I would return to Townsville to get his help to secure a passage on a ship heading north. Before leaving Cairns, I called Colin and he promised me he could help.

This time I stayed on Magnetic Island, accessible by ferry from Townsville. It was an island with undisturbed beaches and an area of protected eucalyptus forest where koalas lived in safety. There was one reasonable sized grocery store on the island located near the pier that accepted the ferries from the mainland. On a Wednesday, not long after I arrived on the island, I called Colin

from a payphone in the grocery store. I was told that Colin was out for a couple of days on business, and could I call back on Friday.

About midday on Friday I called Colin's workplace from the same pay telephone in the Magnetic Island grocery store. This time another colleague answered and she told me he was off on sick leave.

"When should he be back?" I asked.

"Try Monday," she said in a way that didn't inspire much confidence in me. Time was slipping by and I wondered if Colin was really going to help.

As I hung up the phone two shirtless young men entered the store and purchased cold drinks. One of these men was Colin, looking tanned and fit and healthy.

"Hello Colin," I cried out in greeting. "I just called your office and they said you were off sick."

Colin looked absolutely gob smacked to see me but quickly collected his wits.

"I didn't know you were on Magnetic Island," he said. "My buddy Jake here called me last night. We decided if the wind stayed low, today would be a perfect day for kayaking out to Magnetic Island. Our boats are out by the pier."

"I called your office to see if you could still help me find passage to Port Moresby in PNG."

"I promise I'll see what I can do when we get back. Where can I call you?"

"At the backpackers where I am staying," I replied. "Here's the phone number."

Sure enough, I received a call later that afternoon requesting me to come down to the harbor the next day to meet the captain of a vessel bound for Port Moresby on Monday.

She was a midget of a ship compared with the container vessel I had been on from Auckland to Sydney. The captain's name was Jack Van Raders. Originally from the Netherlands, Jack had emigrated to New Zealand after sailing the world as a young man. More recently he and his wife had moved to Townsville to be closer to this regular work he had between Queensland and PNG.

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He wasn't a tall man, but a wealth of tattoos gave him the appropriate seafaring look.

"So you want to go to Papua New Guinea, do you?"

"Yes," I replied, a little intimidated by his appearance.

"Why?"

"I'm just traveling. It sounds like a pretty amazing place."

"Oh, that it is. I've got a spare cabin for you."

"That's great!" I exclaimed. "What do I need to do to pay for it?"

"Nothing. Colin asked me if I had any spare space."

"I would like to help in some way if I can."

"That won't be necessary."

"I'd really like to help."

He thought about that for a moment and asked, "Can you cook?"

"I can make soups and salads. I'm a vegetarian."

"Great. Our cook signed on in Moresby on the last trip. All he has prepared has been greasy overcooked meat; not good for my waistline," he explained, hefting his belly for effect. "He's a nice guy but I don't think he's ever cooked professionally before."

"I'll be happy to help." I added, "I'll see you on Monday." I returned to the hostel, content that I finally had my trip to Papua New Guinea organized.

John P. Haines



8

A Sing Sing

Port Moresby, June, 1987.

While exploring Papua's coast in 1873, the English Captain John Moresby found a break in the coral reef and sailed into a land-locked harbor, which he dutifully named after his father.

When our freighter entered that same harbor over 100 years later after two-and-a-half days at sea, there was no one more relieved than me. My ambitions to assist in training the cook turned out to be very difficult, actually virtually impossible, from the bunk of my cabin where I lay in agony with sea sickness for the duration of the trip. Even thinking of food during that journey caused my stomach to attempt Olympian feats of gymnastics. The only thing that kept my belly's contents heading the right way was gravity and my gargantuan desire not to vomit, which I loathed even more than the feeling of nausea that overwhelmed me.

"You're looking better, John," smiled Captain Jack, when I joined him on the bridge as we set anchor in the middle of the harbor.

"Yes. I feel way better too," I replied. "Sorry I haven't been much help in the kitchen."

"Not a worry. I just got off the radio with the harbor master. The Highland Games are underway and all government offices are closed, including customs and immigration. We can't clear our cargo and you won't be able to disembark until everything opens up again."

"When will that be?"

"Hey. This is PNG. Nobody knows. But I would say that'll happen inside of five days. So I'll be happy if you can show the cook how to make anything other than greasy, burnt meat."

"You're on. I'll go to the galley now."

"Oh John, another thing; my son and daughter-in-law, René and Lorraine, will come on board soon as well. They too are intent on exploring this country."

For the next days I paid for my passage by making salads and soups to feed the four Westerners, the crew of five Papuans and the two Sri Lankan engineers. It was a pleasure for me to have such a well stocked pantry and huge walk-in refrigerator absolutely loaded with provisions to work with. René and Lorraine were down-to-earth and friendly and bursting with useful information concerning travel in Papua New Guinea.

"What exactly are the Highland Games?" I asked them over a lunch I was serving of vegetable soup and cabbage salad.

Lorraine responded, "It's a grand opportunity for the people from all over the country that live in and around Port Moresby to participate in what is called a sing sing, a huge party or gathering, they have here once every year. People parade around in amazing get-ups using feathers and paints and all sorts of natural materials. It's a photographer's dream."

My camera had been gathering dust in my small pack since New Zealand. I was itching to go so I asked Jack.

He said, "I don't see any reason why not. It's in Port Moresby so you won't need a visa or anything like that. I know that Sundaran and Suvik went there yesterday so they know how to find it. Ask them if they'd like to go back."

I had become friends with Sun, a Tamil, and Suvik, a Sinhalese, while on board ship. I found it symbolic that representatives of the two ethnic groups that were fighting it out back in Sri Lanka should work together so well on board this ship. The next day we took a punt ashore and a taxi to the Highland Games.

It was amazing. A level clearing the size of several football fields was cordoned off. Inside were men and women in what looked like tribal groupings in the most imaginative costumes I had ever seen. Some danced while others paraded about. We walked around the rope cordon, 'ooh-ing' and 'ah-ing' and taking

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photos, any of which deserved to be in National Geographic, I reckoned. Some faces were painted bright blue or red, others were half yellow and half white. No two were alike. Feathers from indigenous birds such as eagles or bird-of-paradise adorned most heads. In some cases whole bodies were coated in dried mud and heads were covered in grotesque clay masks, like earthen jack-o-lanterns. A cigarette projected precariously from the mouth opening of one of these masks. Head coverings included animal skins and even a handmade hat that wouldn't have looked out of place on Captain Cook! There were necklaces of shells and teeth—presumably animal teeth! Groups of five to twenty individually coiffed but similarly dressed tribesmen preened and strutted, shimmied and shook to the rhythmic beating of hollowed-out drums covered with lizard skin and the pounding scores of bare feet on the bare earth, feet that had never experienced shoes. The overall effect was of a moving, pulsating garden of scantily clad humanity. It was more colorful than the most lavish MGM musical and at a fraction of the cost.

The physical transformation in appearance wrought by the hands and imagination of these so-called primitive people was breathtaking and bordered on the mystical, surpassing any beauty salon creation by a long shot. I sometimes wonder if the current crazes of wearable art and total makeovers have their roots in these centuries old indigenous New Guinea rites.

By the time I was able to leave the ship and partake of what turned out to be a brief and almost inconsequential encounter with PNG immigration, the ship's cook, with my guidance, had diversified into soups and salads. Captain Jack and the crew were most grateful.

Captain Jack's rugged, tattooed, gruff talking exterior thinly disguised his caring and tender inner being. The memory of my encounter with him, like the memory of a baby's smile, will last forever.

The last day on board I joined Jack and René on the bridge to properly proffer my thanks and farewells. Jack offered me a beer and I accepted. Little did I know at the time, in June 1987, that it was to be the last beer, or alcoholic beverage of any kind, that I was to drink, ever.

My journey with alcohol had been short but tumultuous. My parents drank socially but not to excess. It was their daily ritual to enjoy a drink together when my father returned home from work. It was their way of quietly sharing the trials and tribulations of their respective days, each lubricated by a single drink of rye and water, on the rocks. I vaguely recall my father drinking beer previously but that had to stop after having surgery twice (in his late 30s and early 40s) to ease his hiatus hernia. From that time on he was unable to properly digest steak, most fruit and beer. These items tended to return forcefully to their point of entry.

I began drinking at sixteen or seventeen. My parents were aware of my explorations with alcohol and openly condoned them. They never instituted a list of dos and don'ts. I suppose they adhered to the parenting adage that counts on the behavior of adolescents being established in early childhood through the examples of the parents. Now that I was a young adult they allowed me to explore the world in ways of my choosing, not theirs. I respected this approach of my parents greatly, and still do. It must have taken a dollop of faith and a bucketful of patience for my father and mother to sit back and silently observe my faltering steps into adulthood.

If a drink served as a relaxing balm for my parents, several drinks served as a courage booster for my early forays into the world of dancing with girls. Until I took my first drink I was far too shy to attend a school dance, as much as part of me wanted to. But now I would join a few friends nestled behind a remote hummock of our local airport to sample from a range of alcoholic beverages before walking as a group to a school dance. Pleasantly fortified with the drink of choice and breath disguised with cough drops (I'm not convinced now that the teachers at the entrance were totally naïve as to what we were up to) we would descend en masse into the darkened school gymnasium for a night of dancing. Magically, I had the confidence to ask girls to dance, and they usually accepted. Unfortunately the beer or wine or liquor did little for my coordination or dancing skills.

Within two years I found that I not only had the confidence to attend a dance without the aid of alcohol, but enjoyed the dancing much more when I was sober and in complete control of my dancing appendages. Drinking had served as a crutch to bolster

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my broken confidence; once that confidence was restored I was ready to throw away the crutch.

At one high school party I blacked out after consuming what must have been an excessive quantity of alcohol. It was embarrassing to have friends describe my adventures of that night to me the following day, adventures that I had absolutely no memory of.

This experience of blacking out was to be twice repeated. In the winter break of my first year at university I was one of four young men and four young women who, under the auspices of the university 'Explorer Club', rented a van and drove virtually non-stop for forty hours to New Mexico and Arizona. In Albuquerque, three of us purchased a bottle of tequila, a powerful liquor that had originated in the desert country. That night we set up tents in a roadside high desert area. After dinner, while the others slept, the three of us passed around the tequila bottle, customarily preceding each drink with a lick of salt and following up with a squeeze of lemon. I remember drinking twice from that bottle. That is all I recall until being vigorously woken by my friend Duncan early the next morning. On the way back to his tent after a pee he decided to look in on the three drinkers that shared a tent near his. He found me dead-to-the-world on top of my sleeping bag while my tent mates slumbered cozily inside their bags. I was lying in my underwear with frost coating my bare legs. The outside temperature was 13 degrees Fahrenheit (-8 degrees Celsius). I thought I was going to become a popsicle.

That morning we walked around the Painted Desert, a stunning crimson landscape sprinkled with an icing of snow. We then drove to our ultimate destination, the Grand Canyon. The others exclaimed in ever more glowing terms over the awesome landscape, while I lay in agony with a horrendous hangover on the floor of the van. Back at the university in Ontario I saw photos of an actively engaged and drinking John taken on that less than memorable excursion into tequila heaven. There must be something terribly wrong when one continues to function and converse but has no later recollection of the events transpiring.

My third time unlucky occurred in Spain, during a bus camping trip around Europe I was taking with my friend Chris and thirty-three other young people from New Zealand, Australia,

Canada, and South Africa. In addition to being a cultural eye opener this trip proved to be an almost non-stop five week party. One night in Barcelona, I recall sharing a bottle of Sangria with Chris and some other friends. That is all that I remember until waking the next morning sharing a single sleeping bag with a girl from my tour group, a girl I considered to be like a sister to me. I was profoundly embarrassed. This instance proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back.

When I returned to Canada I began working for the telephone company. I would occasionally enjoy a meal after work with colleagues. On one such occasion, a few months after my return from Europe, I enjoyed a single beer with my meal. The next morning I woke with a whopping hangover. I quit drinking immediately. I was twenty two years of age. Over the next years I drank once or twice a year when on vacation, until that last beer with Captain Jack.

People sometimes ask me why I don't drink. I have no regrets that I did drink for a few years. I enjoyed that time and, as I explained, the alcohol temporarily helped me to overcome shyness. But I have so much fun now, and feel uninhibited without so much as a sniff of alcohol. And I never have a hangover. People speak of using a substance such as alcohol in moderation. That is fine for others but for me I proved through direct experience that alcohol was a poison in my body. A little bit of a poison is still a poison. So why have it? Have you ever seen a young child reach for a drink in order to relax or to be happy or to be playful? What magical boundary do we pass when we begin to justify the use of toxic substances?

I had found a recent Air Niugini in-flight magazine someone had left on the ship. It contained a captivating article about the Trobriand Islands, a small coral archipelago nestled in the Solomon Sea north-east of Port Moresby. This was a time when I carried no guidebooks and relied on serendipitous meetings and happenings to guide my travels. I took this magazine article to be such a happening and decided to fly to the Trobriands.

René and Lorraine suggested I accompany them to the University of Papua New Guinea campus. This leafy academic setting was situated beyond the Waigani suburb north of Port

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Moresby and was accessible by PMV, small vans that served as public motor vehicles. I stayed on campus for a few days while arranging a flight to the Trobriands and using the library to do some preliminary research on this amazing country.

Around Port Moresby and throughout the mainland a lingua franca roughly based on English called Pidgin is the national language that allows people to communicate with each other. It is estimated that about seven hundred different tongues are spoken in PNG, a country with a population of just over five million. New Guinea, today split into the Indonesian province in the west called Irian Jaya and the independently governed Papua New Guinea to the east, is the second largest island in the world after Greenland. It surely has the densest and most varied concentration of languages in the world, in a relatively sparsely populated country. Obviously Pidgin is essential to unify these people that display a phenomenal diversity of language. Despite their linguistic and cultural differences most people share several distinctive Melanesian traditions: wealth based on pigs and shells; a diet based on a single, starchy staple such as sweet potato, taro or sago; small political units led by self-made 'big men'; and a belief in magic and sorcery. These are the traditions that identify the people of New Guinea and its offshore islands, and clearly sets them apart from their neighbors in South East Asia and the Pacific.

I visited the National assembly, housed in an oversized version of a traditional dwelling, and I went to the zoo, which was an opportunity to see some of the unique and richly diverse fauna found in this country. Despite multinational encouragement to diminish it, forest cover is still enormous, estimated at between 70 and 80 percent, and the island supports the last great stand of indigenous tropical jungle outside of the Amazon.

This is a tropical land lightly populated with people, but crowded with bird and animal life. As in Australia, many of the mammals are marsupial including tree kangaroos, wallabies, possums, cuscus and the insectivorous quoll. Some of these creatures are stunningly marked including the black, orange and yellow Black Spotted Cuscus (related to the possum). There are no large predators. Still, it was the bird life that dazzled me. Over 700 species of birds can be found in PNG including 38 of the 43

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known species of the exotic bird-of-paradise. There are numerous other birds of distinction including the cassowary which stands at 1.8 meters high and can weigh up to 60 kg, the Crowned Pigeon which is the size of a turkey, and numerous parrots, bowerbirds and hornbills. Approximately 320 bird species are endemic to the country.

Armed with the beginnings of an understanding of this amazing country and an intense curiosity to find out more, it was time to head to the Trobriand Islands.



9

Arrival in Paradise

I was the only passenger on a small plane soaring over a shallow turquoise sea. Numerous coral islands were scattered about, like flotsam from a shipwreck. Some were large and flat and blanketed in luxuriant woodlands, like green pancakes on an aquamarine plate, and others were mere mounds of limestone, whose coral flanks supported a smattering of coconut palms—rest stops for weary wayfarers. It was as if God was a gardener and had created this oceanic landscape on a playful whim, reaching into a pouch of limestone and broadcasting it about, a little one here, maybe a couple over there, a big one here....

“This is it,” shouted the pilot over the whine of the engines as we began our descent over a largish, level island shaped like some grotesque cartoon character with a gigantic head supported by a skinny, undersized body. I had read that Kiriwina Island was densely populated and this was evident as we flew over scores of small clearings standing out from the surrounding tropical jungle. Plumes of dust followed the wheels spinning over the parched earth landing strip.

I shouldered my backpack and walked to the only sign of man, a one roomed square wooden shelter covered in corrugated iron. It was shuttered and locked up. Just when I was beginning to wonder what I had gotten into, a jeep rolled up, trailing clouds of dust. Heat bent the air. It was hot and still, the sultry fire of the tropics. I was glad I had chosen to wear my massaging sandals, purchased during my first stay in Sydney the previous year. Some of the plastic bumps had broken off, and the soles were held on with dental floss and a song, but they represented a podiatric

memory of my trip through Oceania. They had become very comfortable, and, more importantly, they were cool. The locals here traveled barefoot but I was content to carry a layer, however thin and worn, between my feet and the tropical boring creatures just waiting to tunnel into my tender foreign tootsies.

"G'day mate," called the driver of the jeep in a friendly Aussie greeting. "Where ya headed?"

"I'm not sure," I replied, wiping dust-stained sweat from my brow. "A village perhaps." A university friend in Port Moresby had suggested that visitors could board in any of the settlements dotting the island.

"I'm from the only guest house on Kiriwina. Hop in. I'll take you there."

One guest house. This was obviously not like Indonesia with its well developed backpacking network. I was joined by two young men who had been waiting by the shed. Twenty minutes over rough, unsealed road brought us to the guest house, unimaginatively called the Kiriwina Guest House. It was comfortable, if not opulent. It was dead quiet as well. This was obviously not a 'hot' destination for travelers, temperature notwithstanding. One look at the price list convinced me that village accommodation would be the way to go.

"We passed a big spreading tree at the T intersection across from the wharf. Wait there and you can get a ride north to where most of the villages are," said my expatriate benefactor. "Good luck, mate. Feel free to come by if you need any help."

It was only a five minute walk to the landmark tree, where I joined a small band of locals resting in the shade against the ample trunk. I took off my pack.

I immediately noticed the striking appearance of these islanders. They had tight dark curls, like the Papuans, but their skin was lighter and their features finer. It was as if they represented an ethnological place midway between the Melanesians of the mainland and their Polynesian neighbours of the broader Pacific. They were small of stature and fine boned and muscled. I was like a giant among them. One young man in his late twenties turned to me.

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“Where are you from?” he asked in precise accented English. A four- or five-year-old boy was seated shyly by his side, examining me with big brown eyes of innocence.

“I’m from Canada,” I replied. “Where did you learn to speak English so well?”

“I went to high school here, and I lived in Port Moresby until recently. My son was born there. I worked in a bank. We live in a village to the north-east of here now. Would you like to stay with us?”

It was the best and only offer I had received thus far. I could hardly say no. My new friend, Mark, supplemented my meager knowledge of the islands as we waited for our transport. There was obviously no hurry here. Life and people moved at a Pacific pace.

The Trobriand Island group, of which Kiriwina is the largest, takes its name from Denis de Trobriand, an officer on the expedition of a Frenchman named D’Entrecasteaux, whose name graces the mountainous archipelago we had flown over earlier in the day. The Trobriands were made famous after the Great War by the work of Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. At the start of the war he was offered internment in Australia or banishment to the remote Trobriands. He sensibly chose the latter. His studies revolutionised the methods of anthropology, and his in depth analysis of these islands resulted in his classic series of books including *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and *Coral Gardens and their Magic*.

When Malinowski began his career anthropologists rarely went into the field or even saw the people they were studying. Instead, most often they relied on surveys and reports generated from missionaries, colonial officials, and travelers. The few anthropologists who went into the field stayed at colonial outposts and had natives brought to them for interviews via an interpreter.

Malinowski recognized the obvious flaws in this approach. He felt that it was not only necessary to learn the native language, but also to live with the subject population in order to develop a scientific understanding of the population. This revolutionary approach eventually became known as ‘participant observation’, whereby anthropologists live and work with their informants. It was during his expeditions to the Trobriand Islands in 1915 – 16

and again from 1917 – 18 when he created this new approach for ethnographic fieldwork that remains the standard for research today.

Eventually, a dust-covered open-backed pickup truck arrived and we all scrambled in. We initially retraced our route from the airstrip and then headed further north-east passing one village after another. Each had in its center a ring of raised slotted yam houses, airy storage for a staple crop. Next came one or two circles of sleeping huts surrounded by the ubiquitous coconut palms, banana palms and other vegetation.

Mark's village seemed little different from the others we had seen. There were approximately fifty inhabitants of all ages. Most came over to inspect me when I arrived. Mark offered his house as accommodation. It wasn't very big. Each hut seemed to be crafted to provide just enough space for these little people to lie lengthwise. But for the next few weeks it was my home. I couldn't sleep stretched out fully, so I adopted a semi-fetal position when sleeping. Illuvagai, Mark's lovely, shy wife, moved in with her mother after my first night. There simply wasn't much room for us all.

Daily Life

It took time to adjust to village life. These people dressed in the most basic of worn-out clothing. But they were meticulously clean. They bathed daily at a simple well in the village center. I felt more than a little self conscious bathing in full view of the villagers. Mark saw my discomfort and approached me saying, "The people say you must wash. There is a nearby cave where you can do this as well." He instructed some of the children to take me there.

On this, the eastern side of the island, the land raised up a little as we approached the sea. The cave (and I was told there were others) could be found in that raised area. Inside was a pool large enough to fully submerge and it was lit by a natural opening above. The water was deliciously cool and refreshing. The

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children stood as sentinels by the entrance and they called out to me when people arrived from another village.

There were usually two meals a day. I could have anything I wanted to eat as long as it consisted of bland, boiled tapioca, yams and taro. The day I arrived Mark cut a huge cluster of bananas. These ripened sequentially so that I was able to enjoy at least one every day. People offered me paw paws from time to time. These are, to my taste, a real treat. At my request our meals were sometimes supplemented with some delicious dark green leafy vegetables, cooked of course. Occasionally the three daily starches were sweetened with the milk of coconuts or spiced with salt from the sea.

I observed the considerable boat-building skills of the men. They attached outriggers to handsome, hollowed out canoes. Intricate carvings identified each prow. Simple sails were attached. The men fished frequently, supplementing the bland fare of the surrounding gardens.

These same men sat for hours patiently carving tiny 'toy' canoes that looked remarkably like the real thing. Their sons assisted as appropriately scaled down outriggers and sails were attached. These boats weren't just toys. This exercise served as a creative bonding activity that spanned generations and gave the boys miniature versions of real boats with which to be initiated into the intricacies of wind and sail. I sat often with Daniel, Mark's father, as he assisted Mark's younger brother to craft a boat.

"What are they up to?" I asked Mark one day when he came over to inspect Daniel's creation.

"They are getting ready for a race."

The big day arrived and all the boys carefully carried their boats down to a beach protected by a reef partially exposed by the low tide. The boys steered their craft using long sticks to make adjustments to the fickle winds, as fathers and siblings cheered them on. They were playfully learning the rudiments of sailing skills within the safety of the reef.

Young boys spent hours throwing small sharpened sticks at any available moving object; usually a leaf, and occasionally a coconut propelled along the ground by a friend. They were honing their spear fishing skills with purposeful play.

I walked miles most days. On one occasion I visited a crude collection of some of the island's vast array of butterflies. All colors in the visible spectrum were represented but it was the blues, as big as Giant Swallowtails, that attracted most of my attention.

Another time I walked for hours to reach a village famed for its wood carving. Here I observed a highly skilled artisan inlay bits of shell into a walking stick of polished wood as dark as ebony; it may even have been ebony.

Tropical nights came with an impatient haste that belied the lassitude of the steamy days preceding them. Eyes needed to adjust quickly to nights without electrical lighting. Most evenings teenagers gathered around a fire away from the village. They used a guitar to accompany their unique and gentle Pacific melodies. The fact that the guitar was missing a string didn't deter them in the least. I didn't understand the words but the lyrics seemed simple enough. The guitar was shared, and over the course of the evening all of the children played at least once. Some played with more skill than others but all were given a chance. Adults also played guitar and sang back in the village. One couple played cards every night by the soft glow of a treasured kerosene lamp. Occasionally the women danced in a rhythmic, merry way.

Walking between and through neighboring villages I sometimes encountered young people who pointed at me and called me *dim dim*, their term for foreigner. It was challenging to repeatedly receive this treatment. I suppose the words seemed appropriate for pale outsiders who didn't even know their customs or language.

Each morning I would open my eyes to find several villagers standing outside and staring at me. I felt like I was the main exhibit in the *Dim Dim Zoo*. I have sympathized with the lack of privacy of zoo animals ever since. It seemed to be less than coincidental that I was reading Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughter-House Five* at the time. In the book, Billy Pilgrim, the story's main character, is kidnapped by two-foot-high aliens, taken to their planet and brought to live under a transparent geodesic dome in a zoo.

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I felt for Billy and his lack of privacy as he was observed through his transparent enclosure going about his daily activities. At least I was able to have an early morning toilet stop in the privacy of the jungle surrounding the village away from the scrutiny of curious eyes, unlike Billy who had nowhere to hide.

The Sexual Life of Savages

Malinowski's investigations into the sexual customs of the Trobriand Islanders led to another weighty tome with the unfortunate title *The Sexual Life of Savages*. At puberty males leave the home of their parents and move into the village bukumatula or bachelor house. Teenagers are encouraged to have as many sexual partners as they wish, without guilt.

My observation was that young people were just as shy as in other cultures and there were no obvious free spirited sexual liaisons. Mark told me that people chose their life partners based on mutual compatibility and married in their early to mid twenties. He also said that very few children are born out of wedlock and that there had never been any homosexuality or prostitution in the Trobriands.

During my stay one young couple announced they were getting married by beginning the construction of a new house in a gap in the outer ring of the village next to his parents' home. The father of the groom immediately came to their assistance; and, in no time, the rest of us were busy with thatch for the roof or plaiting of palm fronds for the wall panels. The structure was complete within two days and the nuptial couple moved into a home literally touched and built by all of their family and neighbors, including one tall blonde dim dim. Their marriage grew quite naturally out of a lifelong friendship and compatibility in a guilt-free culture that encouraged freedom of choice.

The Kula Ring

The system known as the 'Kula Ring' involves annual inter-island visits between trading partners who exchange highly valued shell ornaments. The goods used in Kula exchanges consist of two types: necklaces (*soulava*), which circle the ring in a clockwise direction and armbands (*mwali*), circling anti-clockwise. Neither trade item is particularly well made or crafted of rare materials. Malinowski inferred that the principal motivation for the enormous expenditure of time and effort involved in Kula expeditions was non-utilitarian.

In the Kula system, each participant is linked to two partners. One partner trades a necklace in return for an armband of equivalent value. The other makes a reverse exchange of an armband for a necklace. While each Kula partner is tied to only two other partners, each contact has an additional connection on either end of the distribution chain.

This eventually forms the Kula Ring, which links more than eighteen islands and thousands of individuals over hundreds of miles of ocean. Malinowski argued that the Kula Ring serves three functions in Trobriand society. First, it serves to establish friendly relations among the inhabitants of different islands and maintain a pattern of peaceful contact and communication over great distances with trading partners who may or may not speak the same language.

It provides the occasion for the inter-island exchange of utilitarian items. These utilitarian items are shipped back and forth in the course of Kula expeditions. Finally, status is reinforced, since the hereditary chiefs own the most important shell valuables and it is their responsibility for directing ocean voyages.

My observation was that it also provided a means of cementing bonds between cultures and strengthening the gene pool by creating inter-island marriages. There were two young people staying in Mark's village who were not Trobriand Islanders. They had arrived as part of the Kula exchange and were due to stay for at least a year. There was a good chance they would find mates from the village before they returned to their home islands.

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To Give or Not to Give

“Where is everybody going, Mark?” I was determined not to miss anything and when so many of the villagers were heading up the road to the north, I hastened to follow.

“We’re going to the church,” replied Mark. “Do you want to come?”

After my one and only encounter with two friendly enough but lost looking Western missionaries I could hardly disguise my reluctance.

“Come along John. You will find this interesting,” Mark continued. I was forever grateful for Mark’s excellent English. He was one of only three in the village whom I could properly converse with. A twenty minute walk brought us to the church, a tin roof supported by poles, but no walls. I hoped the structure was symbolic of the openness of these innocent islanders. A man was standing on a raised platform. Mark and I joined the several hundred people seated on the ground. I recognized a few faces and estimated there were representatives from about five nearby villages. The speaker addressed the crowd in the local Kiriwina dialect, although he didn’t look like a local. His speech became ever more animated and loud, quite a contrast to the soft spoken approach of the Trobriand Islanders. He reminded me a little of the bible-thumping evangelists you would see on television back home.

“What is he saying, Mark?” I whispered.

“He’s telling us how much money the villagers closer to Losuia gave when he collected from them earlier today. He’s trying to shame us into giving more.”

I was shocked. There is almost no economic activity on Kiriwina Island. These people live in a virtually cashless society. A couple of men in Mark’s village produced beautiful carvings that would eventually be sold in Port Moresby. Otherwise the adults tended their gardens, their children and did a little fishing. None of those activities generated an income.

I also wondered where this donated money would go. I recalled sitting in church as a boy when the collection was taken up. We were told that the money was to aid needy people in developing

countries. PNG was a developing country and the Trobriand Islanders were in serious need of improved education and health assistance. Only a few of the children attended high school. Three of the fifty village inhabitants had died of malaria in the last year. Just the other day Mark's father, Daniel, a gentle friendly soul, was hit by malarial sweats. As unskilled and undersupplied as I was, I attended to Daniel as best I could, sharing my malaria tablets and sponging his brow. I apportioned more pills when a youngster came down with the dreaded disease. The local health clinic had closed a few years earlier, when external funding was withdrawn.

What right did this minister, as a representative of the church, have to suck every last kina from these people and to use guilt to do it?

"What do you think of this, Mark?" I asked.

"This is not good. Why rob the poor to feed the rich? This is why we all have two names. For the missionaries I use my Christian name, Mark. The rest of the time my name is Sabwani." I made a mental note to call him Sabwani from then on.

We returned to the village. The women began preparing the evening meal. As always, someone looked after Daniel, whose wife had died recently. I wasn't able to discern any system to determine who would cook for him, but someone always did. There was no old age home or social security. There was an innate system of sharing in place.

It seemed to me these people lived closer to the biblical teachings than any other group of people I had ever encountered. And they did this in spite of a church that seemed more intent on robbing them than helping them.

Over the centuries, isolated from the rest of the world, these simple islanders have developed a peaceful and fair mode of existence. I dare say that we privileged people of the West have more to learn from them than they do from us. Sabwani had returned home with his family from Port Moresby for his mother's funeral and decided to stay. Once back in the village he realized he would rather give up his lucrative banking job and raise his son in traditional society. How many people would do that?



10

Rejecting the West

Sabwani and I walked past the nearby village of Omarakana, home of the paramount chief of all Trobriand Islanders. “Why does the chief have so many wives?” I asked Sabwani.

“That is one of our ways of bonding people together,” explained Sabwani. “Each wife comes from a different village. Would you like to meet the paramount chief?”

“Yes.”

We entered Omarakana. The chief’s house was slightly higher and more intricately carved than an average village hut. Since the chief was from the Tabalu sub-clan, which is the highest ranking on the islands, his house had to be the highest. Otherwise it looked the same as any other, raised a meter from the ground and covered with thatch. There were a few ornaments and each was a sign of rank. There were fish-birds on the gable boards, representing a combination of porpoises and kingfishers: the first was a purveyor of magical power, the second was a bringer of fertility.

The chief greeted me with a typical warm Trobriand smile. If Sabwani hadn’t told me he was the chief I wouldn’t have known. He looked like any other middle aged islander. An assistant arrived with a green coconut. He skillfully slashed it open with his machete and I feasted on its sweet nectar and jelly-like meat. Sabwani acted as translator. “What is he saying?” I asked.

“He’s talking about his recent trip to Japan.”

I asked him what he thought of Japan.

“Friendly people. Everyone in a hurry.”

I couldn’t help but think that the world’s political leaders should visit this man and these people. Why was the rest of the

world rushing around, accumulating possessions? These people owned little, wanted less, and had more time for sharing with each other than we sophisticated Western consumers.

We carried on. Sabwani stopped to show me a huge stone relic just off the road. "What is the story of this, Sabwani?"

"Nobody really knows. But it must be very old." One could only guess. But I wondered if these huge dressed rocks belonged to an earlier civilization I'd read of called Lemuria that spanned much of the Pacific region.

It was a long walk. Periodically Sabwani would shimmy adroitly up a tree and knock down a green coconut. This kept us going. What a perfect fruit for dealing with the heat of the tropics. A few coconuts later we arrived at Kaibola with its picturesque curved beach. We enjoyed a lazy swim.

"This is where a luxury hotel once was, John," said Sabwani with a mischievous look.

"What do you mean once was?"

"My people burned it down a few years ago. We didn't like the way it was changing our culture."

As we walked back to village in the relative cool of twilight I reflected on the nature of these Trobriand Islanders. They valued their traditional culture to such an extent that they were prepared to physically reject the allure of Western civilization. I admired them and I wondered how long they could hold out. They just might pull it off. They were geographically isolated from the First World countries. Being coral islands, the Trobriands lacked the mineral and timber riches that tended to attract the wealthy countries. The islands didn't strike me as a particularly strategic location for nations with military ambitions. I had seen the crumbling remains of a WWII asphalt airstrip in the center of Kiriwina Island. Insistent tropical plant life had forced its way up through the tar. In a little over forty years nature had obliterated almost all evidence of its existence. I could only hope that this forgotten oasis would remain forgotten. Future generations, their souls nearly lost to technology, would be able to visit this living museum of these simple, peace-loving islanders.

But the path of 'progress' crept inexorably closer. It would take all the resolve of people like Sabwani to keep their idyllic culture

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alive. I was about to observe another assault on their sacred way of life.

Papua New Guinea was granted independence in 1975 and the country had a complex and lively democratic system with almost as many parties as elected representatives. A few days earlier we had been visited by a charming woman from Woodlark Island who was hoping to represent Milne Bay Province in the current elections.

We had just finished another meal of boiled taro, yams and tapioca. I still found this starchy fare bland and tedious. My views were not shared by my hosts. They seemed totally content to eat the same thing meal after meal, day after day. They lived in quiet contentment and sought little excitement to brighten up their lives.

“Come John.”

“Where are we going Sabwani?” I asked, sitting next to him on the veranda of his house.

“You know that man in the big house who is running for election?”

I certainly did. His was the only large house on the island. He lived in a raised three bedroom bungalow in a small clearing on the way to the airport, away from any village.

“He’s offering to show movies.”

I accompanied Illuvagai, Sabwani and Rose, Sabwani’s twelve-year-old sister, along the main road. There was no moon and I found it challenging to see. I followed closely in my friends’ footsteps to avoid wandering off the track. Eventually the steady thrum of a diesel generator and the soft glow of outdoor incandescent lighting indicated we were approaching our destination.

We sat on the ground with other expectant watchers. We didn’t have long to wait. The first film was a pleasant black and white MGM musical, which unfolded in predictable Hollywood fashion. Most of the viewers wouldn’t have understood the dialogue but all appeared to enjoy the music and dance. I have a soft spot for musicals so it was a hit with me. We got up to stretch during a short break as another video was inserted in the player. I wondered what would come next. Again, we didn’t have to wait long. The second selection was one of the Rambo adventure films,

movies I had deliberately avoided until then. I endured, rather than enjoyed, the pumped up violence of Sylvester Stallone. How out of place and intrusive this film appeared. Thank goodness some of the younger children were already sleeping, nestled comfortably in the laps of their parents.

At the end, some of the usually gentle boys got up and began applying kicks and karate chops to their friends. I prayed that Sabwani and other enlightened leaders of these people would have the strength and will to continue to resist the onslaught of the worst of our foreign way of life.

A Nearby Funeral

Drums pounded in the distance. I was excited to see my friends getting into their traditional clothing. The women donned colorful grass skirts and the men simple bark loin coverings. Most women wore red head bands with white feathers. The females put a lot of time into painting elaborate designs in black and white on each others' beautiful faces. Many of the men had tight black bands around their upper arms. Hibiscus, gardenias, and frangipani added further color and fragrance to the ensembles.

Sabwani explained, "There is a funeral in a neighboring village." I must say that it seemed more of a celebration than a funeral.

We joined a huge crowd at the village of the woman, who had been a respected elder. The Trobriands have a matrilineal society in which inheritances are passed through the female side of the family. Elderly women and men receive respect from succeeding generations. All of the women of the village had shaved their heads and applied wood ash to every inch of their nearly naked bodies. They joined in what seemed to be songs and dances of grief. A man signaled the beginning of official proceedings by blowing in a large and beautiful conch shell. The conch is used throughout the Pacific and Asia as a ceremonious means of calling people together.

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I was offered a thick stick about the length of my hand. It looked like solid bamboo. Sabwani skillfully peeled it with his machete.

“It is sugar cane,” he said. “Very sweet.” I chewed the offering, taking my cue from nearby children. It was juicy and sweet.

Food, carried in strong, woven containers, was offered by all the visiting villagers. The close friends and relatives looked and acted somber as they danced around a large open fire. Everyone else seemed to celebrate with a feast and lively chatter. It was a funeral unlike any I had previously attended.

Coffee at Eight

After weeks of being fully immersed in a culture and language dramatically different from my own, I jumped at the offer of the British VSO (Victorian Service Overseas) teachers in Losuia to join them for a meal. They both worked at the island’s only high school, which Mark’s sister, Rose, attended. I was anxious to bounce some of my experiences off them and to hear of their lives as volunteers in a third world country.

We enjoyed an invigorating conversation over a delicious and diverse repast that extended into the evening hours under the soft glow of a gas lamp. I hoped my sensitive stomach would handle the change from the plain boiled yams, taro and tapioca that had entered it twice daily during my stay in the Trobriands.

My senses certainly savored the delicately spiced and baked flavors of none other than yams, taro and tapioca with the addition of a bowl of rice and steamed greens. I was so grateful for this culinary feast and for the friendly company of these two young Westerners that I said ‘yes’ when offered a cup of coffee as a celebratory cap to the evening.

Until this time I had only tasted one cup of coffee in my life. At the age of sixteen I worked part time as a gas boy at our local airport in Oshawa. One sub-freezing winter evening my friend Tom and I took a break from fuelling and taxiing Cessnas. My hands felt like blocks of ice and Tom suggested we have a warm drink to help defrost our frozen appendages. Tom, a year my

senior, was already an experienced coffee drinker. I, on the other hand, was a connoisseur of hot chocolate. There was no hot chocolate in the automatic dispenser that night, so I gave in to my friend's suggestions and attempted to drink a cup of the steamy caffeine for the first time. I was not impressed and vowed then and there to forgo coffee for the rest of my life.

At university, during my first two years of living on campus, I was known to stay up all night cramming for a morning midterm or final exam. These all night vigils were fuelled by drinking cup after cup of tea. This was a normal practice for those of us who had not been organized or motivated enough to spread our studying out over the semester. Some of my cohorts even resorted to popping pure caffeine pills, not unlike the pick-me-up still offered to soldiers in periods of stress. When it came time to sit an exam at nine in the morning I would be literally shaking from drinking tea and studying all night. I found that it was absolutely critical that I empty my bladder just prior to entering the exam for the three consecutive hours of sitting. It was then that I realized that caffeine was a drug and a diuretic.

By the time I began working full time in an office at the age of twenty two, I was a regular drinker of herbal tea—peppermint, rosehip, or chamomile, the three sorts then available in the supermarket. My father was certain I would begin drinking coffee, since an overwhelming percentage of my co-workers imbibed the brew regularly. This drinking pattern must have been going on for a long time because our mid-morning and mid-afternoon breaks had been aptly called 'coffee breaks' by some pundit in the dimly remembered past. I was equally certain that I would not begin to drink coffee; so my father and I entered into a gentleman's bet. He would win honor if I began drinking coffee by the time I turned twenty five and I would be honored if I didn't begin drinking the infamous brew by my twenty fifth birthday. I won the bet easily and continued to turn to herbal teas when in want of a warm drink.

So here I sat at the age of twenty nine, having a cup of coffee in the company of these two hospitable Brits. Aside from the occasional bar of chocolate I had been caffeine-free for years. After brushing my teeth at another wonder, a sink with running water, I retired to the spare room of their palm thatched home. I lay awake for hours. I reclined on still another wonder, a padded

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mattress. I was buzzing and alert. I knew that my body was tired and more than ready for sleep. Why then could I not fall asleep? It didn't take me long to figure out that I was under the influence of a very powerful drug called caffeine. Eventually I did fall asleep, presumably when the effect of the drug wore off. I stayed in bed longer than usual in the morning. But I still felt groggy and hung over when I woke up. I have never had another cup of coffee since that fateful night.

I knew that coffee plantations existed in the highlands of mainland Papua New Guinea and on Bougainville and some of the other islands. I'd heard stories from other travelers of the sad state of food production in these places where the indigenous people had given up their ancestral lands to the colonial powers. The newcomers converted the most fertile areas into plantations of coffee, sugar cane and bananas. Unlike the independent and self sufficient Trobriand Islanders these people, in many cases, no longer grew their own food. Living in a land of plenty, they were starving on diets of mineral deficient bulk imported food.

A Tearful Goodbye

As my stay on Kiriwina wound to a close I sought concrete ways of expressing my gratitude to Sabwani and his family and to the other villagers who had so willingly and graciously accepted me into their circle. I was informed by my VSO friends that the high school was having a fund-raising fair. Would I like to visit?

Here I purchased a live chicken (after watching others having their necks quite unceremoniously broken). It was an adventure carrying this startled creature on the pickup truck back to the village. Sabwani and Illuvagai were thrilled. There were very few chickens in the village so they decided to keep this new arrival alive and encourage her to lay eggs for them.

On another occasion I bought a complete set of strings for the collective guitar of the village teenagers. I looked forward to hearing their sweet voices accompanied by an instrument that had all of its strings. The two shops in Losuia were surprisingly understocked, but I managed to purchase rice from them to supplement

the usual three starches of the villagers. I congratulated Illuvagai on her coconut flavored rice.

On the night before my departure the whole village gathered in front of the hut as I sat with my adopted family. They sang song after song and the women performed a number of dances. There was good-hearted laughter when some of the older women kicked up their heels. I sang my short repertoire of Harry Bellefonte songs like *Matilda*. The young children engaged me in call and response and loved the songs. I realized once again how close I had grown to these simple living islanders.

I was escorted on foot to the airport early in the morning by Sabwani, Illuvagai, Rose and a handful of other villagers. Even Daniel, temporarily recovered from malaria, joined us for the hour long walk on narrow tracks running through gardens, bush and villages stirring with morning activity. One of the young men insisted on carrying my backpack. On an island devoid of electrical power, with only a few motorized vehicles and with village life untainted by telephone, television, radio or newspapers, where people walked and worked using their God-given appendages and sang, danced and played to the Pacific rhythm of 'no time', a slow walk to the airstrip seemed just right.

Packed away in my bags were the necklaces I had purchased for my sisters and a colorful grass skirt I couldn't resist—trinkets to kindle memories. I was laden with gifts of fruit and even some of the cold cooked taro I had come to appreciate, if not love. More important, these radiant beings, these brothers and sisters from the Trobriand Islands, had bestowed on me another priceless gift. They had taught me that life could be simple and that by simply living in harmony with nature and with each other, we humans could be happy. I had been blessed with a glimpse of life before the fall from paradise, before our ancestors tasted the forbidden fruit. I had been given a retreat, however fleeting, from the often senseless complexity of modern life. *To want so little and to give so much*. For me, this is the legacy of the Trobriand Islanders.

There were tears in my eyes as I waved from the plane. My newfound friends and family waved back. Would I ever see them again? That question remains unanswered. I only knew that I was not the same man I had been when I arrived from the sky to this isolated island just a few eventful weeks before.



11

A River Journey

The mighty Star Mountains, near the Irian Jaya border, give rise to two major rivers, the Sepik and the Fly. The closest settlement on the map to the source of these rivers was called Telefomin. This was where I was headed.

From their humble highland beginnings these mighty waterways depart in opposite directions from the watershed. The Sepik tumbles sharply north down the mountain slopes onto a vast floodplain, eventually turning east and emptying into the Bismarck Sea. The Sepik is a culturally and ethnically diverse region. I met one student at the university in Port Moresby who came from a tiny village on the Sepik and who spoke twelve languages. He needed to in order to converse with his neighbors in only twenty villages. I know of no other place on earth with such linguistic diversity.

The Fly River, named after a British warship, the HMS Fly, which navigated the waterway in 1845, plunges south towards the Gulf of Papua for 1,200 kilometers, making it the longest river on this, after Greenland, the world's second largest island. In terms of the volume of water it discharges, the Fly is one of the most powerful rivers in the world.

I booked passage in Port Moresby on a Burns Philp barge that was due to cross the Gulf of Papua and then navigate through the multitude of islands spanning the 80 kilometer wide delta of the Fly River. The sun was setting in the harbor of Moresby as I boarded ship. With the ensuing darkness, the shipboard lights were met with others on shore, transforming the tumbledown port of day into an enchanting south sea haven, an appropriate point of

departure for an area populated with the last Stone Age people in the world. We sailed through the night in a mild tropical storm. I slept well, lulled by the rhythmic thrumming of the rain on my cabin roof. By the time I joined some of the friendly Papuan crew for breakfast the next morning we were already beginning the long and winding journey up the river itself.

It was a journey that took three full days and nights. The weather was friendly, the rain having stopped before first light. Primordial jungle of tree and vine came right to the shore of the iodine-hued river. Crocodiles were said to lurk in the shallows but I saw none. There was little sign of habitation, with most villages set well off the riverbanks due to the threat of flooding. As it is, the changing route of the river means people must move their villages from time to time. Activity was minimal save for gorgeous white-headed eagles soaring overhead and the appearance one dawn of three dugout canoes navigated by tribesmen standing confidently upright, man and canoe gliding at the beginning of time. I supposed the scene was little changed from when Italian naturalist Luigi Maria D'Albertis steamed 800 miles up the Fly River in 1876. En route, he fired rockets at any village he encountered. When the terrified villagers ran off into the jungle, D'Albertis and his men stole any artifacts that interested them. Come to think of it, maybe that was why so few villages could be seen now. Imagine what a memory that experience left these simple villagers of their first encounter with Europeans.

On the second day the ancient forests gave way to a sort of swampy grassland, home to hordes of mosquitoes. The crew, including the captain, consisted entirely of native Papuans. The captain kept mostly to the middle of the river, presumably to avoid the mosquitoes. I was thankful for that. With a drop of only 20 meters in almost 800 kilometers, the river meandered lazily in a snakelike pattern. We passed a refugee camp, filled with displaced people fleeing the systematic genocide taking place on the Indonesian side of the island in what is called Irian Jaya.

After we passed the confluence of the Strickland River, which is nearly as massive as the Fly, we motored along in almost constant threat of grounding. This was the end of the dry season. The captain navigated by chart to avoid the numerous dead ends

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where the river had previously run. He entertained me with stories of previous trips. One time several of the crew jumped ship when they saw an alluring betel nut palm on shore. By the time they returned to the ship it was grounded and they had to wait several days for the next passing barge to carry them out. "At least they enjoyed their betel nuts," quipped the captain. That was just a brief misadventure compared with the crew on a barge that took a wrong turn and ran out of river in the dry season. By the time they were picked up two months later they had established a fine vegetable garden on shore!

This nautical journey was different in two significant ways from the freighter trips I undertook between Auckland and Sydney, and between Townsville and Port Moresby. This time I felt not even the hint of sea sickness, and this time I was a paying passenger with a wealth of opportunity for observation of my surroundings and for reading from the stash of books borrowed from the extensive library at the University of PNG in Port Moresby. I had several novels by Herman Hesse including *Steppenwolf* and *Siddhartha* and a graphic and unsettling account of the decades long struggle of the OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka) against the brutal encroachment of the Indonesian military in neighboring Irian Jaya. I was absolutely appalled by what I read.

The United States, filled with Cold War paranoia, sanctioned the Indonesian takeover of Irian Jaya when the Dutch left in 1963. America hoped that the Indonesians would, in return, not flirt with the Soviet Union and communism. And so, West Papua, as it was known, filled with hundreds of indigenous Melanesian tribes with absolutely no ethnic relation to the Indonesians, was quickly subjugated by one of the largest militaries in the world.

The OPM, or Free Papua Movement, began as a ragtag group who took on the Indonesian soldiers with bows and arrows, fighting against unimaginable odds, and obtaining guns from the men they managed to kill. They struck quickly, often at night, and faded into the landscape they knew so well. They were elusive and brave, but with hardly a chance. It was estimated that 100,000 Papuans, or 10 per cent of the local population, had been killed by Indonesian troops since Jakarta gained control of the territory in

the early 1960s. Activists and refugees claimed the figure was much, much higher. It was a silent war that garnered little mainstream media attention, even though the Indonesians had carried out widespread genocide and deforestation. I wondered again about the media and what is chosen for print. How often did readers really get the truth?

Amazingly, I had even found a title suggested by Captain Jack one night on the bridge when I was less under the weather than usual. The book, authored by Elisabeth Haich, was called *Initiation*, and was an autobiographical account of a woman living in the twentieth century in Switzerland who experienced vivid and detailed visions of another life as a temple initiate in ancient Egypt. It amazed me that a ship captain would suggest such metaphysical literature. Maybe it shouldn't be so surprising. A life at sea is far removed from the distractions of city and culture. A ship was quite literally immersed in nature, where primordial whisperings can sometimes be heard loud and clear. One moonless night cruising noiselessly up the river, I sat alone on deck and personally experienced this visceral reality that is ordinarily hidden from our perception. Staring at the infinity of the heavenly firmament, the whisperings of my subconscious became audible. In the loving embrace of the sparkling night sky the great original questions knocked insistently on the walls of my conditioned mind, as they have since time immemorial with every human being who has been prepared to listen:

Who am I?

Where do I come from?

Why am I here?

And the answers I had heard nightly over many of my early months in Saudi Arabia discreetly drifted into my consciousness:

I am immortal.

I'm going to heal the world.

I can fly (I can live my dreams).

How many mornings had I awoken during my time in Saudi Arabia with the realization that I had been flying (quite literally by

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the seat of my pants, at that) and exploring during the night? I would lie in that half wakeful state and hear the words affirmed over and over, “I am immortal. I’m going to heal the world.” These should have been unsettling notions, but they never felt like that. There was always a calm confidence that accompanied them. Part of this present journey felt like a fulfillment of these nocturnal ruminations. So it was apropos to read these words in *Initiation*, words spoken by a temple priest to a neophyte in ancient Egypt:

But every person who awakens and sees the goal of life goes through the growing pains of wanting to save humanity instead of first saving himself!

Elisabeth Haich 1897 – 1994¹

I felt the need to examine the motives that impelled me to explore this place, one of the Earth’s last pioneer lands. There was a deep urge to understand who I was. Although I was not a trained anthropologist, I was exploring with the romantic notion that in observing these disparate peoples and cultures I could glean a sharper understanding of myself and the capitalistic consumer culture that, like it or not, was my own. I was beginning to see that there were many other ways to live than what I had been conditioned to believe. These other ways had value and if I could observe and experience them with an open mind I could learn from them.

Ok Tedi

Kiunga is a town of corrugated-iron-roofed buildings on the Fly River. It existed solely because of Ok Tedi, the huge copper and gold mine, 100 kilometers further up in the mountains. Kiunga was our destination and we had reached it in spite of grounding briefly the previous afternoon. Our cargo had been a hoard of gigantic tires destined for use at the mine.

1. Haich, Elisabeth 2000, *Initiation*, Aurora Press, Santa Fe, NM.

At the wharf were several other barges including one with a Norwegian crew. Shipping is truly an international enterprise. The rough looking town had a couple of banks and small shops. I quickly found out that I would need to get up to Tabubil in order to commandeer a flight into Telefomin. Tabubil is the purpose-built town servicing Ok Tedi.

I decided to hitch and was soon sitting comfortably in the cab of a truck owned by the mining company. The driver was a chatty Australian administrator for BHP (Broken Hill Properties, the Australian Mining Company with about a fifty percent stake in the mine). He confidently steered along our route, cut recently through virgin forest, ascending the steep mountains. Eventually we reached a crest and then dropped down into the sprawling town of Tabubil. It was overcast, gray and drizzling. The native inhabitants had a slightly dazed and morose look about them. I wondered if this was due to the presence of the mine or to the fact that this was one of the wettest places on Earth with more than ten meters of precipitation annually. That would be enough to dampen most spirits.

My driver, Mac, had taken a liking to me during our trip. He had been amazed that I was visiting the area out of curiosity rather than for commercial reasons like the other Westerners associated with the mine and himself. Mac succeeded in finding me a bunk in the dormitory for temporary mining staff who were only around for short contracts from a week to several months. I was grateful. I had been told back in Kiunga that accommodation in Tabubil was outrageously expensive, at least by backpacking standards. Mac took me to dinner in the company cafeteria in an expansive new and air conditioned structure, where we sat with hundreds of employees, mostly from either Australia or PNG. My questions about the mine were met with open and honest responses from Mac.

At the time Ok Tedi was the largest gold mine in the world outside South Africa. But it was more than a gold mine. It was built on one of the largest deposits of copper anywhere, copper capped with gold. It had been developed in extremely rugged country and challenging circumstances. The first government patrol had entered the region in only 1963. The few people that lived among these precipitous slopes knew virtually nothing of the

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outside world. Not only was it a remote region, it suffered from earthquakes and landslips and that phenomenal rainfall of more than 10 meters a year. It wasn't easy or cheap to extract the riches from these Star Mountains but from the beginning it was decided that the enormous costs were worth it. It took over one-and-a-half billion US dollars to get the project up and running. Operations were meant to get underway in 1984 but a tailings dam, designed to trap waste by-products, collapsed that year, flooding the Fly River with hundreds of thousands of tons of toxic tailings. Ok Tedi, on the verge of getting sued by an Australian law firm acting on behalf of the local tribes, agreed to an out-of-court settlement providing for the local people in financial and developmental ways. The PNG government and the company eventually reached a compromise solution, balancing pollution and mine productivity and profitability. Wastes from the mine were allowed into the river system but at certain predetermined levels which were not to be breached. The environmental damage was weighed against the economic benefits that the mine brought. These were considerable. At the time of my visit over 40 per cent of Papua New Guinea's total export earnings came from this single mine.

After the delicious meal we walked out into the muggy night, passing a group on the way in. I held the door for them and one said, "Thanks, John."

I was looking into the smiling face of Colin, the kayaker who had arranged my passage from Townsville to Port Moresby more than a month earlier. I could hardly believe my eyes.

"Wow. Hi Colin. We're going to have to stop meeting this way. Are you working here?"

"Yep. I arrived a couple of weeks ago. There's plenty of engineering work for me here." He winked at Mac. It suddenly dawned on me why Colin was able to secure passage for me earlier. Captain Jack's ship had been laden with massive coils of cable for Ok Tedi. I hadn't put it all together until now.

"Where are you staying, John?" asked Colin.

"He's bunking in the dorm," replied Mac.

"I'll come over and see you first thing in the morning," said Colin. "How about a little tour of the mine?"

I couldn't argue with that.

The deafening blast of a siren shattered the mountain air. A massive machine, the size of an apartment block, creaked forward on caterpillar tracks through the deep mud. It repositioned itself against a wall of rock and extended an arm. A giant shovel at the end of the arm clawed at the rock face, scooping up 30 tons in a single sweep and dumping it in a waiting truck. The truck itself was enormous, with tires taller than a man, and capable of carrying over 175 tons of rock and earth at a time. I could see why we had brought so many giant tires up the Fly. A row of these vehicles queued up at the shovel. Every two minutes or so 175 tons of mountainside was carted away.

From a safe distance and protected by hard hats, Colin and I watched in awe at the magnitude of the Ok Tedi project. This was not the 'spend your day in a dark hole' mining that my grandfather loved and that I had witnessed in Kalgoorlie in West Australia; the kind of mining that gave my grandfather, and countless other miners like him, silicosis (a fancy word meaning 'dust in the lungs'). No, this was the 'knock the top off a mountain' kind of mining that incapacitates fewer miners but destroys more rivers and ecosystems.

What an ecosystem this was. Colin led me onto a rough track through the surrounding rainforest. The din of the machinery grew muffled and then disappeared. Sometimes you don't realize how noisy something is until you are removed from the source of the noise. We were walking through a primordial rainforest with bare ghost-like trunks reaching up to a dense canopy high above. Now the only sound was the dripping of rain percolating through the foliage. This place with its 10 meters of annual rainfall was truly a rainforest.

There was remarkably little undergrowth. I supposed the dense shade and nearly perpetual cloud cover precluded it. What plants there were on the forest floor were spectacular. Clusters of impatiens, the popular garden plant, grew in perfect health in ideal conditions in their natural endemic setting. Gorgeous patches of red, orange and pink festooned the dark ground, heavily mulched with leaf litter.

This had truly been a morning of contrasts—the near deafening din of man's modern manufactured monstrosities juxtaposed with the still, subtle paintings of the adjacent antediluvian jungle.



12

Back to the Stone Age

I flew out of Tabubil in the smallest of planes. It didn't seem much bigger than the four seater Cessna 172s I used to fuel and taxi as a teenager. The pilot poked the nose up through the low hanging gloom and we were immediately floating in a pristine powder blue world over fluffy white candy floss clouds. It was enough to put a smile on your face.

Telefomin was a short hop over the spine of mountains that bisected the island from west to east. The mission station was only opened in 1948 and was still one of the most isolated places in the country. But it lay in the rain shadow of the mountains and was bathed in the relatively cool mountain sun. Fundamentalist missionaries had hit the area's culture hard and the mission had a church, museum, a coffee shop run by Peace Corps volunteers, and a sprawling cluster of government buildings housing rangers from Australia and other parts of PNG.

The Peace Corps couple invited me for a meal and put me up for the night. The rangers I spoke with about getting into some more remote spot near the Irian Jaya border were helpful but a little dubious of my plans. They explained that this was rough country and a young German man had gone missing recently while walking between two remote villages.

I met a local boy in his mid teens who suggested I accompany him and his mates to their home village, a day's walk to the east. I accepted. It would give me a taste of what tramping was like in these rugged, bush clad mountains.

We had a great day together, making our way with the speed of the young along a track that I would never have been able to

follow without their help. We stopped for a dip in a surprisingly cold mountain stream. Were these the headwaters of the legendary Sepik River? A couple of the older boys carried bows and arrows. They explained to me why there were four distinct styles of arrowheads, made of what looked like bamboo. Some were for birds, some were for small animals, some were for pigs, and some were for humans. I realized that I was hiking with people who had been headhunters until very recent times. It was interesting that I never heard a raised voice or witnessed an act of violence in any form while in PNG. Port Moresby had a reputation for crime. It was virtually the only city in the country and so drew people from all over hoping to find jobs. When the anticipated work didn't eventuate, these immigrants realized they didn't have the security of their home villages to fall back on. Some of the young men would form gangs. They were called rascals and they would sometimes wreck havoc on other residents and visitors. I saw none of this. I met only friendly people everywhere; perhaps the friendliest I'd met anywhere in my travels through more than sixty countries. I felt totally safe with these people and was convinced they would do me no harm.

Late in the afternoon we encountered adults working their gardens of kau-kau (sweet potatoes), peanuts and bananas in small, steep clearings in the forest. Their ancestors may have been the first farmers on Earth. These Stone Age farmers with pointed sticks could raise more sweet potatoes per acre than the white man could with all his fertilizer and machinery. I was welcomed into the village with the same graciousness and hospitality that I encountered everywhere in this frontier land. I slept on a raised platform beside the fire. The nights were cold in the mountains. In the morning I helped roast freshly grubbed peanuts in the glowing embers. They were delicious.

The airstrip for the village was a long, sloped grassy clearing. Horizontal landing strips were obviously hard to come by in this folded, rolling landscape. The clearing served as a soccer pitch for a motley crew of barefoot children. I say barefoot. There was one running shoe, which in the course of the game moved from player to player, much as the guitar had been handed from teenager to teenager in the Trobriands.

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I stayed two nights in that village and was unable to verbally communicate with any of the adults, except for the universal symbol of friendship, the smile. Here, I noted, the smiles were even bigger and more innocent and genuine than they had been back in Telofomin with its shop, school and mission. Could it be that man's natural state, unfettered by the trappings of the modern world, was unbounded friendliness, compassion and generosity?

When I returned to Telefomin after another long walk through orchid-laden foliage I was determined to complete my original quest. The lure of the unknown had drawn me thus far. I purchased a plane ticket to an airstrip that had been cleared only two years before. I acquired topographical maps and laid out a rough route from that landing strip to a village high in the mountains on the Irian Jaya border. I was going to return to the primitive roots of man.

I stocked up on rations that would also serve as practical gifts for locals that I stayed with along the way. I didn't want to be another European trading beads with the natives.

Our small plane approached an impossibly steep strip of emerald grass cut into the endless swath of forest. I took my cue from the pilot and remained calm. Our touchdown was rough but uneventful; just a typical landing for the airmen of New Guinea. In such perilously rugged terrain the airplane remains the main link between isolated villages.

I was met by Ruben, a teacher from the Sepik River system. He spoke excellent English. I quickly found out that this was not a village. Ruben explained that the site was chosen because it was the best place around for an airstrip. I'd hate to see the worst. There would be no soccer played on this pitch; the downhill side would be too disadvantaged. Ruben proudly showed me his traditionally constructed house and the one-room school where he was beginning to teach the local children.

"Our shop is closed today, but would you like to see it?" he asked.

I nodded numbly. It seemed incongruous that such a place, where surely the people earned no income, would have a shop. Ruben unlocked the door of the tiny structure which was no

bigger than your average bathroom. He showed me the small collection of notebooks, pads of paper, pens and pencils.

"How do people here buy these things?" I asked.

"I give them to the children in school," replied Ruben.

In a short sweep my eyes took in the remaining items in the store, which included stuffed animals displayed on the walls and boxes of disposable diapers. I glanced at the cluster of children following Ruben and me. They were naked. They spent their lives outdoors. What possible place did disposable diapers have for these people? And stuffed animals for children whose ancestors had for millennia made do with the products of the local environment? These same people had been practicing their simple, sustainable form of agriculture for countless thousands of years while the rest of the world's inhabitants, including my ancestors, were systematically wiping out animals for food. The surrounding rain forests were intact and teeming with animal and birdlife, a testament to the balanced approach these 'primitive' people had with nature.

I set out the next morning with my two barefoot guides, child-sized men who barely came up to my shoulders, clad in loin cloths and each carrying the ubiquitous woven sacks holding cold, cooked kau-kau. I felt more than a little over-provisioned in hiking boots and socks, shorts, T shirt, and a backpack filled with food, sleeping bag, spare clothing, notebook and pen. As it was, I had left books and other items safely behind in Telefomin.

These men only spoke the local tongue. I had to trust that they would escort me to the Irian Jaya border. Ruben had translated my request to them and had sorted out how much they were to be paid. Within half an hour a precipitous descent brought us to a bridge (if that term can legitimately describe one vine that you walk on and two that you hold) suspended high over a river violently crashing across massive boulders in the chasm below. The bridge (again I use the term tentatively) didn't look new and I momentarily wondered if the warnings I had received from the patrol officers back in Telefomin had been prophetic. My tiny companions scampered across this oversized spider web, one at a time, and then looked back at me. Did I detect the hint of sly grins? I gave my silent thanks for the good life I had received, and took my first tentative steps. The 'bridge' held!

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I spent most of the next three days doing my best to keep up with my lithe and extraordinarily fit guides. I didn't seem to be able to portray to them with sign language that it was acceptable to take a break from time to time. We didn't stop at all that first day and our pace was swift and unwavering. I even found a way to flick leeches off my skin while still moving. I couldn't afford to lose my guides.

Just before dark, we arrived (my guides fresh as daisies while I was on the threshold of apoplexy) at a tiny settlement of six huts and a spirit house, all raised a meter off the ground. We were given pride of place in the longish spirit house, and were joined by the men and boys of the village. I never saw the women. I wondered if this was just an extended family rather than a village. This was the first sign of habitation all day. Now I understood why we had been traveling at a semi-jog. Where would we sleep otherwise? I prepared rice which was shared by all. The villagers' contribution was kau-kau. At least it was warm. One of the men brought in a pink hairless creature no bigger than my hand that everyone seemed to be very proud of. Was it a lizard? It finally dawned on me that this was a baby cassowary. I felt like Wallace or Darwin as I realized how closely this pre-fledged 'birdling' resembled a reptile.

The next day my guides were as unrelenting as before. The one opportunity to stop came when I discovered wild raspberries on the path side near the top of a particularly steep ascent. I flopped down, exhausted, and, with hand motions and facial expressions, convinced my companions to stop and eat some of the absolutely delicious berries. Otherwise, my friends ate only cold cooked kau-kau. I grew to abhor this shriveled and often charred excuse for food.

Our second night we slept in a round thatched-roof hut on a hilltop. The structure rested directly on the ground. Again it was the only sign of habitation we had encountered all day. Its owners were a young couple. He was clad (a generous term) in a penis gourd and she in a grass skirt. By the startled looks on their faces, they had not seen a white man before. As astonished as my hosts were by me, I found it amazing that in the age of the computer pockets like this existed where the stone axe still flashed.

My companions must have explained that I was harmless and unfit, barely able to keep up with them. Once again I prepared rice, and kau-kau was contributed by our hosts. It was genuinely cold on the hilltop so we slept on the ground around a central fire that was kept burning through the night. There was no overhead ventilation and the entrance was covered with a thatch flap. Needless to say, the internal air quality left much to be desired.

I must say that I was relieved when we reached our destination the following afternoon and I could actually converse with the PNG man from Lae, who was in charge of what turned out to be a refugee camp. When he heard of the route of my walk he told me that only one white man, a European anthropologist, had ever entered those forests before. Frankly there hadn't been much to see, apart from the occasional burst of color as a bird of paradise flew through the foliage high overhead. I had discovered, however, why the initial task of an anthropologist is to master the native language. Mute companions make monotonous company.

The settlement straddled the invisible boundary between two countries. There were no customs or immigration officials. You could eat in Indonesia and sleep in PNG. Of course, when Europeans arbitrarily established the location of the border no consideration was made for the fact that some tribes lived on both sides of the frontier. The refugees in this encampment were escapees from unspeakable atrocities happening with shocking frequency in nearby villages in Irian Jaya.

Most were only too happy to pose for photos in their traditional outfits; the women clad only in grass skirts and the men sporting penis gourds. A few of the women wore brassieres, which made for an interesting fashion statement. I wondered how long these people would be allowed to live as they always had. Then I realized that these were refugees who had been forced to leave the only valleys and forests they had ever known.

Somewhat cynically I contemplated the progression they could look forward to at the hands of the white man. First, the missionaries would get hold of them, with all the best intentions, I might add. To a man who has lived in a Stone Age environment his entire life, the sight of an airplane would seem miraculous, surely not fashioned by the hands of man. When that same native learns about heaven and white man's God, he often puts two and

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two together. That's where the gadgets, the airplanes, and the flashlights come from.

Then along comes the youthful aid worker, volunteering in altruistic sincerity to assist these primitive peoples to gingerly enter our world. Thus he or she introduces the shop and the concept of trade and consumption. Movies and television (both available in Port Moresby) complete the process. Who wouldn't want to experiment with living like the wealthy Americans portrayed in films and television series? Rare are the individuals such as Sabwani in the Trobriand Islands who quickly see through the veneer of materialism and work steadfastly to retain the important elements of cultures that developed over eons, independent from ours.

Two hair-raising flights (I still had hair to raise then) returned me to Telefomin. I shared the last aerial leg with a woman with a broken arm. The rest of her family accompanied her, holding live pigs, presumably brought along to pay for the flight and the doctor.

Sitting on the porch of the café in the comfortable afternoon sun I conversed with a middle aged local man who spoke excellent English.

"I don't understand why the white man teaches us about their prophet, Jesus. He didn't come here. For generations we have been told of a prophet who came to our ancestors in the distant past. He taught us of agriculture—how to cultivate kau-kau and other vegetables and fruits. He taught of the many plants growing in the jungle that we can use if we are sick. And he brought with him nine rules for living, which are identical to the Ten Commandments the missionaries teach us.

"He also said that one day people with white skin will come and they will knock the top off a mountain and that would cause great difficulties for the people."

He was obviously referring to Ok Tedi. I had just completed reading *Initiation* and include here the following words from that book which were uttered by the Temple High Priest in ancient Egypt:

John P. Haines

All the Sons of God have always brought and always will bring the same truth into different parts of the earth, but people will interpret it differently depending on the characteristics of their race and their degree of development. These different interpretations, as they get passed on to later generations, will give rise to different religions all springing from the same truths. One and the same Son of God will reincarnate himself at different times to humanity. And from the same truth proclaimed by the same spirit, people in different parts of the earth will develop different religions. Because of such differences arising merely from human ignorance, people will make war upon each other, trying to send one another to hell 'in the name of God'.

Elisabeth Haich 1897 – 1994¹

1. Haich, Elisabeth 2000, *Initiation*, Aurora Press, Santa Fe, NM. Copyright English language edition 2000. With permission of Aurora Press. www.aurorapress.com
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13

A Hotel and a Healer

I made my way back to Tabubil by plane, the pilot miraculously finding an opening in the ugly charcoal clouds that blanketed the perpetually drenched settlement. I caught another truck to Kiunga, and from there returned by plane to Port Moresby, via Daru.

I wondered what would happen to this primitive and innocent land, as Western men, eyes glinting with greed, pressed these tribal people to give up their wealth of forest and minerals. I sincerely hoped that their traditional form of shared ownership would protect them from rampant development, which threatened to usurp one of the last inhabited wildernesses on the planet.

My visit to this virgin land had transformed me and my view of the world. A dream began to form, a dream in which I would live closer to nature, and share responsibility for a self-contained lifestyle with like-minded people. This dream developed out of my observations of the Trobriand Islanders and other PNG villagers, and out of the reading of the books I had so effortlessly and serendipitously found in the university library in Port Moresby. Arguments in E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* for compact village-based, decentralized and sustainable economic and social units, were compelling and continue to influence me greatly. The subtitle of the book said it all: *The Study of Economics as if People Mattered*.

As I had arrived in Papua New Guinea by ship I had no airline ticket out of the country. I had to return to Ontario for my sister Beverly's wedding in September. I then intended to fly to China as part of a plan to enter Tibet. It was logical, therefore, to fly to

Hong Kong, where I knew cheap tickets could be found for a return flight to Canada. What I hadn't counted on was the outrageous expense of one way tickets from Port Moresby to Hong Kong. It obviously wasn't a common route for travelers. I found it would cost nearly as much to fly to Hong Kong as I reckoned it would to fly from Hong Kong to Toronto and back. There were no cheap flights to any place from PNG. The best rates went to Australia, which was logical since most expatriates living in PNG came from there. But Australia lay in the opposite direction from my intended destination.

With the luxury of time I would have sought out a freighter to North America. Two months in this amazing land had robbed me of that luxury, and my sister Beverly had chosen to ignore my earlier audacious request to postpone her wedding so that I could continue with my leisurely travels. I could hardly blame her.

But what would I do?

Ever since my arrival in New Zealand I had been plagued with persistent pain in the left side of my abdomen and intermittent spasms of pain on the right side under my lower ribs. Needless to say, this had caused me considerable anxiety. What was wrong with my body? Were these symptoms related to the meningitis? I had read recently of the wonderful results certain psychic healers in the Philippines had with some seemingly incurable illnesses. Perhaps I could fly to Manila, visit a psychic healer, and then catch a freighter to Hong Kong. Surely there would be plenty of shipping traffic between these two busy Asian ports.

I purchased a one way ticket to Manila for an exorbitant sum, and flew to the Philippines. My arrival was not without anxiety. Many countries want visitors to have ongoing tickets when they arrive. The Philippines was no exception. Obviously, I didn't possess such a ticket, so I was a little uneasy while passing through immigration and I was greatly relieved when no questions were asked about my travel plans beyond the borders of this sweltering archipelago.

Manila quickly revealed itself to be part of that exclusive club of huge, noisy, busy, and extremely polluted Asian cities to which Bangkok and Jakarta belonged. It was hot and humid, and sweating was unavoidable. The palpable pollutants and dust found

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their way into my eyes. I was forced to blink excessively in an effort to keep my vision clear. Within two hours I had a headache that didn't leave until I departed this megalopolis the next day.

I walked to the harbor in search of ships to Hong Kong, but cut short my search when I reached the beach, only to find it covered in piles of rubbish, cardboard, and sheet metal. It seemed a bizarre place to put a rubbish dump. When my approach became intimate enough to see detail, I realized this was no tip, it was housing for a seething mass of humanity. Dressed in little more than rags, they were going about their daily routines of bathing (in the filthy ocean), cooking (on makeshift tin cans over open fires) and eating (on the sand). Many had young children. They were a sorry, unhappy looking lot. In PNG I witnessed the radiant happiness displayed by villagers who possessed almost nothing. Here I saw that owning little didn't guarantee happiness when the living conditions were demeaning. What we call rural poverty does not equate to urban squalor. These precarious ocean-side slums stood in sharp undisguised contrast to the palatial residences and government buildings found on adjacent streets.

I spent part of my evening at a restaurant where all the waiters were midgets. Philipinos aren't big in the first place, so for a few hours I was truly a giant. By this time I was suffering from sensory overload, as one might imagine, so I retreated to the relative quiet of my room, my head still pounding. Manila seemed to be a city that didn't sleep, and rest was what I desperately needed. Unfortunately, sleep, in this turbid atmosphere, was pitiful at best.

I didn't savor another day in this civic cesspool looking for transport to Hong Kong so I took the earliest bus available to Baguio City, where many of the psychic healers were said to reside. I was befriended on board by a local who said he would be happy to help me find a hotel and a healer, in that order. I was grateful for the assistance. During the hours-long trip into the beautiful terraced hill country north of Manila, this man unloaded on me the bizarre story of his grandfather. It seems the Japanese occupied this part of the country during World War II. His grandfather witnessed a Japanese soldier burying a treasure trove of gold bars. He had no idea where the gold came from, but the soldier was obviously hiding it with the hope of being able to

return for it some time in the future. As everyone knows, the Japanese lost the war, and this soldier left with his compatriots, never to return. In time the grandfather dug up the gold but did nothing with it. He reckoned his government would find a way to claim it should he try to convert it to cash. It is entirely possible the gold had been pillaged from government vaults in the first place.

Years passed by, according to my storyteller, and the secret of the gold was handed down from father to son and from son to grandson. Each yearned to convert the gold into currency. These were poor people, and they longed for the 'better' life that increased funds could produce. I thought the story, fact or fantasy, made for interesting listening. Little did I know that I was about to be encouraged to participate in the drama.

Upon arrival in Baguio, my benefactor, true to his word, led me directly to a clean budget hotel in the heart of the city. I checked in, and in no time was seated in a taxi on my way to a healer.

It is my understanding that Baguio City is the birthplace of a man who became the original renowned and reputedly highly successful psychic healer. He developed a way to literally reach into the body of a patient and physically remove tumors, blood clots and other unwanted toxic material. There was no bleeding and no scarring and very little discomfort to the patient. The results were often spectacular, and many cases of near instantaneous cures led to a barrage of patients arriving on the healer's doorstep.

In time he passed his secrets on to others. As one might imagine, these disciples met with varying degrees of success. The original healer charged nothing and relied on donations, claiming that his abilities, God given, would dissipate if he attempted to make money from them. His progeny held disparate scruples, and charged a huge range of fees. One of my stipulations to my helper was that I wasn't prepared to pay exorbitant fees.

The taxi brought us to a pleasant residential area adjacent to a hillside place of Christian pilgrimage. We parked by what appeared to be a neat, middle class home. We entered and met the healer, a man of indeterminate age. My friend translated as I explained my background and current list of symptoms to him and a man I took to be his assistant. We were led to a clean room

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containing nothing but a table and a small garbage tin. A dusty window looked out on the garden. It was indicated I was to lie on the table face up, which I did.

The healer approached and pulled up my shirt, exposing my tummy. With the help of my friend I showed him where I was experiencing pain. He gently placed his hand over the spot, just below my ribs. He prodded around a little. I felt nothing unusual. I wasn't able to see what he was doing. After perhaps fifteen minutes, he brought his hand up and showed me what looked like a round clot of blood about the diameter of my thumbnail.

I must admit I was skeptical. Was this sleight of hand? Did this clot come from inside my body or was it just some tissue removed from meat prior to cooking? There was no way for me to tell. I was told it would be best to return the next day for further treatment. No, there was no need for payment until treatment was complete. This, I was told, could take several days. It was explained that payment was to be a donation of an amount I felt comfortable with. This alleviated some of my doubt. I decided to leave some money then, as I was unsure of whether I would return. I was told to rest and this I did for the afternoon after the return trip to my hotel.

All that Glitters is Gold, Perhaps!

About 4.00 pm the hotel proprietor knocked on my door.

"There is a man downstairs at the front desk who says he knows you," he said in his excellent English. "Should I let him come up?"

"What does he look like?" I asked, appreciative of the concern shown by the concierge.

He described my bus friend and benefactor, Romeo.

"I know him. Send him up please."

I was sitting up in bed reading, feeling a little queasy and wondering if this was a result of my visit to the healer. The door opened and in walked my friend. I was startled by his appearance. He was sweating and looked very nervous. He was wearing a coat,

which was at odds with the climate. This was hill country and decidedly cooler than Manila, but it was still the tropics.

He began, "John. You know the story of my grandfather."

"Yes. Of course."

"And you know that for more than forty years my family has been able to do nothing with the gold."

"Yes," I said. Frankly I found the story pretty unbelievable, but he was a harmless little man and he had been helpful and friendly to me.

"I wonder if you will take some gold to Hong Kong with you and exchange it for money there and send some of the money back to us here."

This was sounding stranger all the time.

"Oh. I don't know, Romeo. I'm not sure what the Hong Kong immigration authorities would think of that."

"I like you John. I trust you. I would not want much money from you now; just a little to guarantee your honesty."

"Look Romeo. I feel uncomfortable about this. Where is this gold anyway?"

He looked nervously around at the closed door to the hall. He walked closer to the bed, and opened up his jacket, not unlike a crook about to show inside pockets full of stolen watches for sale. But he had no watches with him. Instead he revealed a single bar of what looked like gold! This was getting really bizarre. Romeo was obviously very nervous. He began to stutter. "Look-k-k-k closely John. This is real g-g-g-gold. Feel it." He handed me the bar.

I am the first to admit I am no expert on gold. I had seen it being worked into jewelry in the gold and silver souks in Saudi Arabia. I know from my rock collecting days that gold is a relatively soft mineral. This foot long bar was very heavy for its size. I scratched with my thumb nail and felt an almost imperceptible give to the metal. This was definitely not pyrite (Fool's Gold). It also didn't appear to be a lead or steel bar painted with gold paint or coated with a layer of gold.

I thought, *It could be the real thing.*

I said, "Romeo. You are a good man. It has been a long time since the war. Can't you get it exchanged into money here in the Philippines?"

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“No. It’s too corrupt here. I would be put in jail and forced to show where all the gold is. Of this I am sure. That is why I am asking you.”

Now I was sweating. I was feeling physically and emotionally vulnerable after my visit to the psychic healer. Romeo’s nervousness was rubbing off on me too.

“Romeo, I need time to think about this. I am not going to take this bar from you now. I am very concerned about taking it to Hong Kong. Even if I safely got it into the country, I wouldn’t know where to go to exchange it into money. Give me time to think about this.”

Romeo once again concealed the bar inside his jacket. He didn’t conceal his disappointment.

“I will come back tomorrow to take you to the healer,” he said.

“No. I’ve decided. I don’t want to go back there,” I responded. “I also think I can safely say no to your offer of the gold, Romeo. Sorry.” I felt relieved to have been decisive.

Romeo turned to go, still sweating and shaking with apparent nervousness. He closed the door. Was he telling the truth or was he an exceptionally skilled actor? I wondered if he had attained that high perfection where he believed his own lies, making it exceedingly difficult for the listener to distinguish deception from truth. At this point I just wanted him to leave me alone and go and find his Juliet.

My room suddenly seemed far too small and a very long way from home. I needed some fresh air and time to think. This visit to the Philippines was beginning to feel like a mistake. I went outside and began to walk. A man approached and said, “Do you remember me from immigration at the airport?”

This was a touchy spot for me. Did he know that I didn’t have an ongoing ticket? Then I thought, *How would he find me here? Immigration must have better things to do with their time.* I had had enough. The story this man went on to tell (involving a sinister doctor, a card game and the mortgage on his house) was at once plausible and bizarre. I was beginning to wonder if he’d graduated from the same acting school as Romeo. I was naïve, but this was ridiculous. When I finally got away from this character I truly wondered if my life was in danger. I must have been in the wrong part of town. It seemed everyone I met except the hotel

proprietor was a con artist. Back in my room I composed a letter to dear friends in Toronto outlining my concerns and giving the details of where I was. In case I disappeared, I wanted people to know where to begin a search. Was I being paranoid? *Better safe than sorry*, I figured. When I began my overseas life nearly four years before, I sought adventure. These Baguio City experiences crossed an unwritten line into a murky world I had no need or desire to visit. I got out of town on a bus first thing the next morning and spent a couple of restful days on the beach, near an American military base. After a bus trip back to Manila, I flew to Hong Kong and then to Canada, uneventfully, and in time for my sister's wedding. My friends in Toronto were happy to hear from me when I returned. "Better safe than sorry," I said.

During this time in Ontario I pulled my little Alfa Romeo Spider out of storage and made a journey to North Bay, Ottawa and Montreal to visit friends. In North Bay I was reunited with Jim, who had been a colleague in Medina, Saudi Arabia. His partner, Linda, after hearing some of my stories said to me, "I've got some books I think you'll enjoy." She brought out a stack of Lobsang Rampa books she had been collecting. This series of paperbacks outlined this lama's life growing up in Lhasa in Tibet and his monastic and medical training in the great schools that were then found there. Some people suggest these books are the fictitious product of the active imagination of a British writer. I refuse to judge the source of something that inspires me. Fact or fiction, these books, which I borrowed to read during my upcoming journey across China, opened my mind to concepts previously unknown to me; concepts such as reincarnation, astral travel, and more.



14

Appendicitis and Red Tape

Hong Kong, September, 1987.

Hong Kong never failed to amaze me with its mixture of old and very modern. Every time I returned I got the impression that the very modern was threatening to completely usurp the old. I looked up a friend I had met in Bali. He was sharing a flat with a friend. He described the flat as a typical Hong Kong family apartment. The rooms, all three of them, were tiny. The local people are not large, but in my eyes this would make very cosy living for a family. I slept on the floor.

My friend, a journalist, had a spare ticket to see Miles Davis, the famous jazz musician. He asked if I would like to go. How could I refuse? Miles' eccentric quality of standing with his back to the audience did not detract from the excellence of the music. Still, afterwards I could not help but compare this technically precise and difficult music to the simple, melodic tunes of the Melanesians of Papua New Guinea. Is our modern music with its electric light shows and masses of speakers a reflection of the electric world in which we live? My heart longed for the simple natural melodies of the Pacific Islanders.

A few days in the densely populated high-rise heaven of Hong Kong was enough to motivate me to move along. I took a night ferry up river to Canton where I would begin my Chinese adventure, creeping ever closer to Tibet. I delayed just long enough in this sizable city to appreciate its traditional plan embracing the elements of Feng Shui. The city faces south to the river and is embraced by artificially extended canals. It is

surrounded by supportive hills to the north and several protective pagodas had been built inside the Northern wall. All this was well and good but I longed for something quieter.

I flew to Guilin in southern China. Guilin is populated in part by one of the country's multitudinous ethnic minorities. One walk around the local food market demonstrated to me why I had not yet heard a bird or noticed wild animal life in China. It seemed that any furred or feathered creature that moved and breathed was in a cage to be sold for food or medicine. I assumed any lucky survivors were in hiding.

I booked into one of the Western hostels and, after an early meal, I plunked my tired body down on one of the twenty or so beds in the dormitory and promptly fell asleep. I had noticed backpacks by perhaps four of the beds but the owners must have still been out for meals. One other person was reading in bed and the room was otherwise empty.

As is my habit, I slept soundly and woke early. I was amazed to see that all the beds were now occupied by sleeping male and female travelers. They had obviously all arrived and settled in while I was fast asleep. After going to the bathroom I sat on my bed to enjoy a simple fruit breakfast.

One other person at the end of my row of beds stirred and sat up. Occasionally in life one experiences a sort of instant recognition when seeing someone for the first time. When my eyes met those of this very attractive blonde young woman I could tell that she also had that kind of instant remembrance. Other dormitory residents began to wake and stretch and our initial visual connection was broken. Still, I thought that I would like to meet this person. She continued to look my way so I offered her one of the mandarins I was breakfasting on. She gratefully accepted.

Thus began our friendship. We spent the day exploring the backstreets of Guilin. After a cozy restaurant meal we sat together by a temple and talked until the gathering darkness was infiltrated by the light of a full moon. Evy was a German student specializing in health and the Chinese language. This trip to China was an opportunity for her to expand her already considerable Chinese linguistic skills and to experience the Chinese culture first-hand. After all, a language is bound inextricably with the

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culture and geography from which it springs. Evy was approaching the end of her extended stay in China.

We spent the night in another traveler-packed dormitory. A good bit of my night involved dodging the beds of sleeping travelers while I hastily made my way to the toilet to be violently ill. I assumed I had eaten something that gave me the Chinese equivalent of Montezuma's revenge. Evy sweetly supported my nocturnal ramblings.

In the morning I felt considerably better. Evy wished to spend a little more time in Guilin but I still longed for something quieter so I took local transport to nearby Yangshuo. This riverside country town is surrounded by the spectacular limestone karst formations that would be instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with Chinese landscape art. These extraordinary mountains rising abruptly and perpendicularly from the fertile plain are said to perfectly represent the shapes of the five elements of Chinese philosophy. It was certainly an enchanting environment waiting to be explored. But first I needed to find a room.

After two nights in dormitories I felt fortunate to find a reasonably private room with only three beds. One was occupied by a Japanese woman and the other two were free. I was finding out quickly that the Chinese didn't attempt to separate men and women travelers into separate rooms.

I put my backpack on one of the two free beds, a top bunk, and proceeded outside to explore the town of Yangshuo. I returned late in the afternoon to a very pleasant surprise. The third bed in the room was now occupied by another woman—Evy! She and I both expressed more than mild surprise at this coincidence.

"Great to see you," I exclaimed. "But what are you doing in this room?"

"This is the room the man at the front desk gave me," explained Evy.

"But there must be fifty rooms in this place!" I exhorted.

"This is where they sent me," she went on.

Still amazed, I said, "There are many other lodges in Yangshuo. This is a popular destination for travelers."

"I can't say why, but this is the hotel I chose," justified Evy.

"Well it looks like destiny has brought us together again."

"Yes, John. It reminds me of the words from a John Lennon song, 'Life is what happens while you're busy making other plans.' A little while ago I found a good little restaurant. I'm due to meet a friend there shortly. Would you like to join us?"

"Certainly," I replied.

We joined this friend, a very congenial Frenchman Evy had met on the trip from Guilin, in a tiny restaurant with four tables. Evy translated the menu for us. It was then that she and I discovered we were both vegetarian. The three of us had a very pleasant meal, followed by an equally enjoyable evening stroll. We all agreed to meet in the morning, rent bicycles, and ride out into the countryside. The feelings between Evy and me were taking a romantic turn, but Marcel was such a charming companion we were both happy to share time with him.

The following morning dawned crystal clear. The karst formations were silhouetted beautifully by the blue sky. The natural monuments stood as guardians over the lush landscape, like eroding, oversized megalithic stone warriors. We rented three dilapidated single speed bicycles. Despite their aged appearance, the bikes would be perfectly adequate for the leisurely explorations we had in mind. At that time many of the Chinese peasants did not own bikes. They were definitely a status symbol for the few that did own them. The old collective farms of the long-standing communist regime were gradually giving way to small agricultural efforts by individual families. We enjoyed watching the peasants in their peaked straw hats, working in the verdant richly-hued rice fields.

It was most agreeable to see the ways in which people put their bikes to whatever service was required. Children were often perched on the front handlebars of a parent's bike. One farmer rode by with live ducklings cleverly strapped to his rear fender.

Eventually our peregrinations brought us to the base of a particularly attractive formation called 'Elephant Rock' that all the guidebooks said was a must to climb. We left our transport by the roadside and began the ascent. A few people passed us on their return journey. Otherwise we were alone.

I arrived first at the level area on top. I was immediately enthralled by the 360 degree view. The seemingly numberless

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limestone pillars thrust upwards from the patchwork of multi-colored fields. I wondered if the pillars acted as receptors of cosmic energy. They looked like natural standing stones, a sort of Chinese Stonehenge for giants. Evy arrived next, sweating. It was a fairly steep climb. Marcel was a long way behind. There was no one else there.

“Wow,” cried Evy. “Look at all the butterflies!”

She had a right to be excited. The place was awash in beautiful little butterflies, flitting gracefully about.

I’ve always loved butterflies so the following words spilled, unplanned, from my mouth: “I’ll bet if I sit really still a butterfly will land on me.”

“Give it a try,” responded Evy, encouragingly.

I sat absolutely motionless on top of this huge stone. I closed my eyes and was aware of the sound and feel of soft warm breezes around me.

After a couple of minutes I opened my eyes to see Evy staring at me. I was completely covered in butterflies, from my head to my toes, like one of those trees the monarch butterflies gather on each year outside Santa Barbara before venturing south to Central America for the winter.

In a few minutes Marcel and some other visitors reached the top. The spell was broken. The butterflies disappeared, perhaps to visit some quieter hilltop.

Evy and I said nothing but we both knew that something magical had happened in that window of time when we were alone on the top of Elephant Rock.

“What were you thinking when our eyes locked together for the first time in the hostel in Guilin?” I asked Evy. The question came as we relaxed in the double room we had found down the hall from the room we had shared with the Japanese traveler the night before.

“I thought I was looking at the main character from my favorite Karl May book, *Winnetou*. That character ends up visiting Santa Fe in the American South West,” explained Evy.

I was flattered even if I had never read a Karl May book, let alone heard of the author.

That night I woke shortly after midnight. Once again I was vomiting. This time I also experienced intense pain in the lower right part of my belly. There was no way I could sleep. Evy woke and I explained to her where the pain was.

"I think you've got appendicitis," said Evy as she got up to turn on the light. "I had my appendix removed a few years ago. Your symptoms are the same and where you are feeling the pain corresponds exactly with where my scar is. I'll go find a doctor."

"But it's the middle of the night," I protested.

"This is not something to play around with. I'll go find a doctor."

As Evy ran off and I writhed in pain, I reflected on the circumstances that had brought us together. Communication with the Chinese people was sporadic at the best of times; but here I was with Evy, who was able to converse semi-fluently in Mandarin. What would I have done without her?

She returned to the room after a few minutes and said, "I woke up the hotel owner and he is calling a doctor." I was doubled over in pain but very appreciative of Evy's boldness. A doctor arrived within minutes. He asked, through Evy, what I was experiencing. He then inserted some acupuncture needles into my torso. He also gave me some little black herbal pills and instructions to go to the hospital if the pain persisted in the morning. His efforts brought enough relief that I was able to get a little sleep.

However, at six in the morning I still had this very intense, unrelenting pain in my belly, in the area of the appendix. When I tried to walk I doubled over in agony. Evy arranged for a taxi and in minutes we were in the local hospital. Thus began a day that seemed to last a week. I would be asked to sit in a chair while someone I assumed was a doctor would press various spots on my abdomen. When they pushed on the painful spot I would just about jump out of my skin. Evy explained my symptoms to them in Chinese and then they would leave. After some time another 'doctor' would show up and we would repeat the performance. Then they would explain to Evy that we would have to go to another part of the hospital for tests. I would then stumble bent over in pain to the next examining room. There yet another Chinese person dressed in white would probe my belly. This went on all day. I was beginning to wonder if nearby doctors had been

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called just to join in the show. Or perhaps local shopkeepers and taxi drivers were given white jackets and asked to humor the Canadian man. Frankly, I didn't see the humor in it at the time.

At some point in the early afternoon I found a moment of lucidity in the middle of this absurdity and asked Evy, "Why is nobody actually doing anything?"

"I don't think they want to take responsibility," she replied, sounding frustrated. "They all feel you have appendicitis but they are reluctant to operate because if there were complications they'd be responsible."

"What about the big complication if my appendix bursts and I die?"

"Then they could say it wasn't their responsibility," she said. "Isn't this ridiculous?" she added in exasperation.

Great, I thought, *Bureaucracy has numbed these people and I'm caught in the ensuing inertia*. The pain was so excruciating that I was prepared to sign a form accepting full responsibility for any outcome.

The day dragged on as we were shuffled from one room to another. Evy remained the one bright spot in this mess. She was like the sun shining unquestioningly on all, regardless of their behavior. She patiently explained over and over what was going on to me and to the Chinese doctors, nurses, shopkeepers and taxi drivers.

Evening was approaching and I was still alive. The pain had not abated one iota. Someone broke from the established tradition for the day and said to Evy that they didn't have the facilities for an operation. We would have to go to the larger hospital in Guilin. Obviously in this way the doctors could absolve themselves of all responsibility. We were left with little choice. Evy arranged for a cab to take us back to the hostel. Here we, or should I say Evy, checked us out and quickly shoved all our gear into the taxi. We then climbed in. Thus began the most painful trip of my life. The driver, sensing our urgency, flew over the twisting and poorly maintained road. We were almost constantly bounced in all directions. I was beginning to think that if I could survive this trip I could survive anything.

At last we arrived in Guilin and we were dispatched outside of a large unlit hospital. It was nearly dark. We walked inside. It was

just light enough to see that the place was very dirty. Crumpled up bits of paper were scattered about. It was eerily quiet. There were no other patients to be seen.

"What's going on now?" I asked, doubled over by the reception desk.

Evy made some enquiries and found out that the hospital had problems with power. She was assured that it should be working in a day or two. *Terrific*, I thought, *We've jumped from the frying pan into the fire*. After our jostling taxi ride we were both in need of the facilities. Evy went first and returned with a pained look on her face. She looked away from me, saying nothing. I made my trip and instantly realized why Evy had looked so upset after her visit.

"It stinks in there," I said. "What a mess." I had seen some pretty grotty toilets in my travels but this one took the cake. It was literally overflowing with excrement.

"Yes," agreed Evy. "I've been asking and it turns out that the pumps for the water supply rely on electricity so there is no water either."

Great, I thought, *I'm going to have an operation in the dark in this filthy place that doesn't even have running water*.

"We're only here because the doctors in the Yangshuo Hospital were happy to pass the responsibility to the people here," Evy stated the obvious. We both understood this turn of events only too well.

"I think we'd better go," I said, calmly despite the pain.

"What do you mean?" responded Evy, looking at me questioningly.

"I'm simply not going to get treated here," I emphasized. It was so clear to me that the best thing we could do was to leave. We walked out and found one of the few available rooms in a multi-storey hotel adjacent to the hospital. I laughed to myself. *The place is probably filled with patients from next door*.

Amazingly, the moment we left the hospital I began to feel better. The pain subsided and I could walk upright again.

We sat in our little room and enjoyed a meager meal of dried fruit and nuts. It was the first thing I'd eaten since the evening before. Evy had only nibbled on a little rice at lunch time.

"I'm so grateful you've been here to help me, Evy," I said.

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“It has really been my pleasure despite the places we’ve had to be in. It seems that it had to be this way,” she replied. “But I have to leave tomorrow. I only have a few days left in China and if I don’t leave here tomorrow I won’t be on time to catch my return flight to Germany.”

In the morning I felt a little ragged but otherwise completely recovered. There was no pain. Evy and I had a tear-filled goodbye as I helped her on her bus. We had been through a lot together in a relatively short space of time. We wouldn’t quickly forget the experience.

I couldn’t explain why, but I wasn’t the least bit concerned about my appendix. It simply felt as though the experience was well and truly behind me. I knew I was safe.

John P. Haines



15

Xinjiang

I made my way to the local airport for my flight to Chengdu. Word on the traveler grapevine was mixed over access to Tibet. On the first of October, to mark the 37th anniversary of the Chinese invasion of Tibet, there was an anti-Chinese demonstration in Lhasa. Several thousand Tibetans demonstrated, burnt down a police station, stoned police and set fire to vehicles. Nineteen Tibetans and an unspecified number of Chinese police were killed. Only later was I to understand more fully the implications of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. At this point my interest in the conflict between oppressors and oppressed was a selfish one. I simply wanted to visit Tibet. According to other travelers, the Chinese were notorious for keeping foreigners out of Tibet in times of struggle. I could see that my window of opportunity to visit the fabled high plateau kingdom was closing if not already closed.

Chengdu was one of the principal gateways to Lhasa so I would have to go there in order to find out if I had a chance of visiting Tibet. Guilin and Yangshuo are in an area of China with large groups of indigenous people. Chengdu was, for better or for worse, really Chinese. It was a big, noisy, busy, smelly city with a huge statue of Mao dominating the city center. My enquiries about Lhasa met with no success. The route into eastern Tibet via Chengdu was closed. Some travellers spoke of another route from the north starting from Urumqi in the distant Xinjiang province.

Even though the odds of gaining access to Tibet seemed low I had to try. I managed to buy a ticket for a sleeper car on a train bound for Urumqi. I boarded the next morning for the three-and-a-

half day trip. The view out the window in the beginning was largely of a dun-colored dusty land denuded of trees. It wasn't exactly a desert but it wasn't a verdant oasis either. A highlight was seeing a small portion of the Great Wall west of Lanzhou. From that point on I think it would be safe to describe the landscape as extremely arid, open and desolate. After half a week on board it was a relief to disembark in Urumqi.

This city was cold and interesting with a diverse ethnic mix of inhabitants. A thin crust of snow did its best to decorate the ugly, recently constructed concrete structures that mark the new China. My hotel was huge and multi-storied. The good news was that there was hot water. The bad news was I had to share the shower with a large group of Chinese men. Unlike the rooms in Guilin and Yangshuo, the showers here were segregated.

Urumqi lay on the Silk Road. It was fascinating and mouth-watering to watch men preparing noodles. It is said that Marco Polo introduced this idea to Italy after tasting noodles in this part of the world. Millions of pasta lovers worldwide are glad he did. Vegetables (and meat if you wanted) were served with the noodles in a decidedly non-spaghetti way. The food was delicious nonetheless.

One early morning I found a large group of Chinese doing Tai Chi in a frigid city park. Later I visited an incredibly diverse market with stalls offering a variety of vegetables, fruits, clothing, bicycle repairs and one with a macabre assortment of animal parts for traditional Chinese medicine.

Young men played billiards on tables outside. Small children wore pants with permanently open slits in the back so trousers didn't need to be pulled down to meet nature's needs; a handy design feature for a cold place. Presumably the children didn't mind the breeze!

I soon found out that the northern access to Tibet originating in Urumqi via Turpan was also closed. The idea of turning around and going back on the train didn't appeal to me. Instead, I decided to carry on to the west and eventually cross over into northern Pakistan. It looked as though my long-held dream of visiting the Hunza was about to become a reality. But first I would have to complete another three-and-a-half day journey; this one on a bottom-battering bus. The distant snow-clad Tian Shen Mountains

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to the north provided a continuous backdrop. Toilet stops were simply a matter of the passengers spreading out and squatting over roadside fields. I wondered if local farmers paid for the privilege of receiving fertile human contributions.

A couple of stops brought blessings of mouth-watering watermelon. Otherwise, there were few meal stops. I was happy I had stocked up on dried fruit and nuts for the trip. Days were from sunup to sundown and sometimes longer depending on the distance between settlements. Towns were few and far between. After long days on the bus, sleep gave respite from the bouncing over the most basic of roads. There had been a little asphalt in Urumqi. There was certainly none to be seen on this journey.

Night time temperatures dropped below freezing, and accommodation was unheated and spartan, so after a warm evening meal my sleeping bag was a welcome sanctuary.

Aside from a young Japanese traveler my bus mates were mostly Uygars. Together with White Russians and Tadjiks, Uygars comprise a significant portion of the population in Xinjiang Autonomous Region. They are of medium height and stocky build with dark hair and distinctly Eastern features. But their language is Turkik, and they write with an Arabic script. Most are Muslims. They were cheery travel companions. They carried a wild assortment of cooking pots and food, and prepared meals along the way. After listening to very loud Uygar music for most of the first day I handed the driver a couple of my tapes. He kindly acquiesced and played them, also very, very loud. I'm not sure that was a great improvement!

The openness of the Takla Makan Desert landscape grew on me. One realizes what an enormous country China is and what a significant journey the Silk Road was for people of the past traveling in a less mechanized manner.

I found more Westerners in Kashgar and with this came more food prepared to Western tastes which was a treat after the long, rough trip. The round bagel-like breads baked by the Uygars were delicious. Kashgar was an oasis. For centuries it has served as a crossroads for travelers and traders throughout Asia. The Sunday market was amazing. A Swiss friend, Marcos, and I arrived at the market grounds early to enjoy the jumble of horse-, donkey- and

mule-drawn wooden carts, and camels and people on foot converging on the market. People streamed in from all corners of the countryside along poplar-lined tracks until the central market area became one tumultuous roar composed of the accumulated cries of buyers and sellers. What fun!

Uygar men with long black coats and boots and long white beards were a marked contrast to the brightly dressed women. These women, unlike their counterparts in some other Islamic lands, were unveiled and just as active and vocal as their husbands in the day's trading.

I was fascinated by what we called 'surprise' watermelons. To our eyes these fruits all looked the same on the outside, but on the inside they could as easily be yellow or orange as red. Regardless of the color they were amazingly flavorful. Marcos and I dripped and drooled our way through an entire melon for brunch. I also thoroughly enjoyed the sweet yellow carrots and the unique flavor and crunchy eating of pomegranates.

If so inclined one could buy all manner of livestock including horses, goats and camels, building materials, hand-turned pots and an exciting range of clothing. A few Westerners were dressing as Uygars in the hope of sneaking into western Tibet in the back of a truck. The fur-lined coats, boots and gloves could prove to be a practical and warm disguise with a winter rapidly approaching on the Tibetan Plateau.

Of Ice and Men

After the market day I purchased a ticket for the bus to Pakistan. I was just in time. I was told that this would be last bus of the season to traverse the Khunjerab Pass before snows made the route impassable. The Khunjerab Pass, at over 16,000 feet (nearly 5,000 meters), is one of the highest road crossings between two countries in the world and is therefore open to vehicular traffic for only a few months each year.

As it was, the three day journey to the border was fraught with delays—from engine trouble to rock slides. Human ingenuity and determination won out as we pushed on. After a night under the

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ancient fortress at Tashkurgan, we were rewarded at the time of yet another vehicle breakdown with the timeless sight of a camel train traversing the tundra-like terrain. The backdrop was two colossal ice-covered mountains, Mount Ataz and Kongur, protruding from the otherwise empty plateau like gargantuan purpose-placed pyramids.

In the course of the journey our eclectic band of travelers from more than ten countries, thrown together on a ramshackle Chinese bus, became a friendly, sharing international community. It never failed to amaze me how quickly friendships were forged when traveling. Away from the security of family and friends people were open to new and often temporary relationships. At heart most of us are social beings, and freed from the barriers of responsibility and haste we might experience in our home settings, travelers reached out, unhindered to one another. It was as if the national borders were thrown open and people looked at each other as equals, comrades in the discovery of the new.

One of the members of this international collage of intrepid adventurers was an American man in his late thirties named Jay. He had thinning brown hair, a hooked Semitic-looking nose and amazing brown eyes that were at once piercing, luminous and convivial. A look from Jay hinted at the opportunity to know the unknowable. The man exuded a good natured, yet serious amiability. I found his presence to be captivating. He was not your typical traveler, if there was such a beast. It wasn't long before our initial banter deepened. I just had to find out more about this man.

Over a snack of nuts and raisins I asked Jay, "Where were you traveling last?"

"I haven't really been traveling in the expected sense. I've been at Mount Kailash in Tibet with a small group of friends."

"I think I've heard of Mount Kailash. Don't Tibetans call it a holy mountain?"

"Not just Tibetans. For longer than anyone can remember Kailash and the adjacent Lake Manasarovar have been places of pilgrimage for people of all religions. It is a very remote and powerful place. Some people call it the heart of the Earth," explained Jay.

"Were you on a pilgrimage?" I asked.

"In a sense you could say that," said Jay. "Did you participate in the Harmonic Convergence?"

"Not that I know of. What was that?" I asked curiously.

"The name was coined by an American researcher of the Mayan calendar. The exact dates were August 16th and 17th this year. I gathered with a small group of like-minded people for an extended period of time at Mount Kailash for meditation and other practices, before, during and after the Harmonic Convergence."

"But what exactly was this Harmonic Convergence?" I persisted in asking.

"It was a time prophesied by the Mayans and substantiated by modern astronomers. Only rarely do all of the planets in our solar system come into alignment. Mid-August was one of those times. There is an immense opportunity at such times to participate in and support a sort of shift in planetary consciousness. I would rather not use the term but some would call it the dawning of a 'New Age'."

"I'm beginning to understand," I said. I felt a little disappointed that such a momentous event had completely passed me by. "What exactly did you do at Mount Kailash, Jay?"

"I'm not at liberty to say," replied Jay. "We had some amazing experiences though, life changing ones. I'm a little tired now from my trip out of Tibet but I still feel energized by what I participated in. I would not have missed it for the world."

I wondered if that timeless look in Jay's eyes had anything to do with his Harmonic Convergence experiences. I made a mental note to find out more about this so-called planetary turning point.



16

The Legendary Hunzas

Northern Pakistan, October, 1987.

Not only did we leave China behind at the white world of the pass, we also traded the cramped but, by now, familiar bus for a cluster of gaily-painted Pakistani minibuses for the next stage of our trip into the fabled Hunza Valley.

The Karakorum Highway is an anomaly and a misnomer. Yes, it is a road, but to call it a highway is to be extremely generous. The two-lane road was completed in 1978 with painstaking effort and the loss of many lives, 400 in Pakistan alone. The construction of the road has meant that there now exists an overland trade route between Pakistan and China for motorized vehicles, and this route travels right through the Hunza. Until the opening of the Karakorum Highway, the only overland method of entry into Pakistan from China was on foot with the assistance of beasts of burden such as the camels we had witnessed some days before. The first tourists weren't allowed through until the early 1980s.

Our precipitous descent into the Hunza Valley came as a surprise after the steady, laborious journey ever upward to the pass of the last few days. The steep 7,000 meter mountains that have for centuries protected the Hunzas from outsiders are actually a confluence of three mountain ranges—the Pamirs, the Hindukush and the western extremity of the Himalayas. Here the mountains are called the Karakorums, meaning 'moving rock', and there is the ever-present threat of avalanches, earthquakes and

rockslides. The awe-inspiring mountain landscape is a result of a continental collision that continues to this day.

We soon found ourselves beside the roiling, powerful waters of the Hunza River, flowing purposefully to its rendezvous with the mighty Indus. Our stalwart little group was moving just as purposefully towards our meeting with Pakistan's immigration authorities in the first village, Sust, we would enter in the country's Northwest Frontier Province. Many of my travel-mates were Pakistanis and for them this was merely a formality. Some of the Westerners had previously acquired Pakistan visitor permits in Hong Kong, China or in their home countries. Others, for various reasons, didn't have these permits. As such, we would need to rely on the generosity of officialdom at this remote outpost. This generosity was initially not forthcoming. The four of us without permits were threatened to be sent back to China. I found this to be absurd since all of us knew that the last crossing for this year of the Khunjerab Pass had been ours. A young English woman was brought to tears by this treatment.

"They're only trying to get us to pay baksheesh (a bribe)," I attempted to comfort her. Eventually it was agreed that the four of us could have ten day permits to travel through Pakistan, for a price, of course.

We all settled into a hostel in Sust for the night. It had been a long and tiring day. We enjoyed a simple hot meal in our first Hunza restaurant. I sat beside Jay. I decided to pick the brain of this American mystic. There was a good chance that we would be parting soon.

"Jay. Do you have any practices you can suggest that I do?" I asked.

"Sound the vowel tones at each of the energy centers in the body," said Jay

"Where are these centers?"

"They're called chakras. I'll show you." He went on to point out to me where the seven main chakras were. The system he suggested seemed logical to me but I felt I would need more specific guidance before I would begin such a practice.

The next morning we navigated the amazing tortuous bends in the 'highway' until we arrived at the drop-off point for Karimabad, the main Hunza village. A dream kindled by a

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magazine article I had read as a teenager was about to come true. That 1973 National Geographic article written by Dr. Alexander Leaf had investigated the lifestyles of exceptionally long-lived people, including the Abkhazians of the Caucasus Mountains, the Vilcabambans of Ecuador and the Hunzas.

The Hunzas may be descendants of the invading Macedonian army of Alexander the Great. Supposedly a detachment of that army deserted on Alexander's return to his homeland. Eventually, these soldiers married local women and settled in this isolated mountainous region. There is certainly plausibility to this theory as many of the Hunza people don't look at all like their Asian neighbors. They are a tall, proud, long-lived people comprised of three or four relatively distinct groups or tribes. Most have dark hair although some are redheads and a few are blonde. Eye color varies from brown to green to blue. One tribe has darker skin like many of the neighboring mountain groups. The rest are fair-skinned. Their language, which they call Brusheski, bears no linguistic resemblance to any of the languages around them.

The Hunzas are Muslims. But rather than belonging to either of the two main Islamic sects, the Sunnis or the Shiites, the Hunzas are followers of the Aga Khan, making them Ishmailis. The women do not wear veils. The former kingdom has only recently been annexed by its southern neighbor, Pakistan, but the Hunzas continue to tithe ten percent of their earnings to the Aga Khan rather than to the Pakistan government. This money comes back to them in the form of roads and schools. Unlike some of their Muslim neighbors, Hunza girls receive an equivalent education to boys. In theory, Pakistan provides military support to the Hunza.

Most of the people speak several languages, out of the necessity of trading and communicating with their neighbors. Until recently the Hunzas were presided over by a Mir, who traditionally lived in the 600-year-old white-walled Baltit Fort that perches fairytale-like above Karimabad. The view from this 2,500 meter high village is stunning, with the Hunza River carving its way through the terraced valley surmounted by the gray rock and snow-covered jagged peaks of the adjacent mountains. To the south, Rakiposhi looms. At just under 8,000 meters this summit isn't quite in the league of nearby K2, but it is nonetheless the highest mountain in the world from base to crest. I was surprised

to hear that Rakiposhi was 35 kilometers from Karimabad. The mountain was so massive that it gave the impression of being just beyond the next village to the south, a few scant kilometers away.

Doctor at Large

It was that time in the autumn when the yellow, gold and rust-colored leaves of the poplars and apricots created a rich chromatic contrast to the stone houses, stone terraces and stone mountains.

I wanted to feast longer but would have to settle for a nibble. I had befriended a Swiss doctor, Marcel. He and I agreed to travel together to Islamabad where he thought he could help me to extend my ten day travel permit. He had visited Kashgar for a little rest and relaxation from his efforts with *Medecins sans Frontieres* (MSF or Doctors without Borders) in Afghanistan. He explained that he had badly needed the break. In Afghanistan he was never far from a bomb shelter as bombing was almost a constant and imminent possibility. Upon hearing his stories I was left with deep admiration for people like Marcel who risked their own lives to help the people in the beleaguered and war-torn land of Afghanistan.

The trip south took days as we soon found out that the Karakorum Highway was not a misnomer after all. The road was a 'high way' through black rock that frequently dislodged and blocked our path. There had been heavy rain the previous week and initially there had been more than twenty rockslides wholly or partly blocking the road. Many of these had been cleared by the time we arrived but work was ongoing and we were stopped several times. South of Gilgit we found our way blocked by an enormous landslide. Our minibus had to stop where the road literally disappeared under masses of earth and rock. Marcel and I walked back to the nearest village but there was no available accommodation. We returned to the location of the landslide. The road workers put us and a Frenchman up in their tent for the night.

The next morning, after a surprisingly restful sleep, Marcel and I donned our backpacks and hiked up and around the landslide.

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Within an hour we were on another minibus headed south. The road continued to parallel the powerful Indus River for a time. Our gradual descent coincided with a measured warming of the air. We overnighted in a village Marcel had previously stayed in on his way north. While sipping delectable fresh squeezed pomegranate juice we were entertained by men working with huge vats of dye, big enough to lose a person in. Marcel turned to me and said, "Local legend has it that Jesus, known here as Issa, spent time in this village with Mary and Thomas. They came here as part of an extensive trip Jesus made to the East during that period of his life that remains unexplained in the Bible."

"That's interesting. As far as I know Issa is Jesus' name in the Koran. That is what people called him in the Middle East when I was there. Are you referring to that time when Jesus was between the ages of twelve and thirty?" I asked.

"Yes." Marcel continued, "But there is also evidence that indicates that Jesus and his two companions were here after the crucifixion. I have visited a small town near here called Mari. There is a mountain near that town called Pindi Point. On that mountain is an old tomb called Mai Mari da Asthan or 'The final resting place of Mary'. The tomb is said to be very old and local Muslims look upon it as the grave of Issa's, or should I say Jesus', mother. The tomb is oriented east-west which is consistent with the Jewish tradition. Muslim graves are oriented north-south and Hindus at the time of Christ cremated their dead and scattered their ashes just as they do today."

This news seemed to link in with similar reports I had heard when visiting Kashmir. I determined to further research this fascinating topic when the opportunity presented itself.

The following day found us in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Rawalpindi (Pindi as it is locally known) is the original older settlement. Islamabad is a modern, spacious, purpose built capital for the country of West Pakistan that originated with the partition of India in 1947. Marcel checked us into more comfortable accommodation than I had become accustomed to. I enjoyed my first hot shower in weeks—one of life's little pleasures. Enjoyment of most anything is surely multiplied after absence from it.

True to his word, Marcel steered me in the right direction to extend my visa. I walked into a large office on the third floor of a relatively modern government building. The immigration official got up from behind his large and empty desk. I couldn't decide whether he was very organized or simply didn't have much to do.

"Salaam allay kum," I said in greeting.

"Allay kum Salaam," replied the official in the standard way. He shook my hand and then spoke in excellent English, "Why have you come here?"

"I only have a ten day transit permit which I would like to extend so that I can see more of your beautiful country," I explained.

"May I see your passport?" he asked bluntly.

I handed it to him and he took time to examine it. He raised his eyebrows in dismay and said, "You have come in from China. Why did you not have a proper permit before you came into Pakistan?"

"When I first began traveling in China I didn't know I was going to visit Pakistan. Later, when the decision was made while in Xinjiang province there was no place for me to apply for a permit. China's a big country and I would not have been on time to make the last bus over the pass for the season," I explained. The story was honest but I realized it was not a strong one. My concerns were echoed in the response of this increasingly belligerent civil servant.

"I am sorry. I don't think I can help you. Leave your passport with me and come back at this time tomorrow," he said, standing again to shake my hand and indicating it was time for me to go. I left, not very optimistic about my chances of being able to stay longer in the country.

The next day, at the requested time, I returned. The immigration officer stood, shook my hand again, and after the usual preliminary greetings handed me my passport.

"Thank you," I said as I accepted the offering. I didn't look at it, holding little hope for a visa extension. I walked outside, feeling forlorn. On a whim I opened the passport and, to my astonishment, found a thirty day visitor permit for Pakistan. I would be able to return to the Hunza after all.

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Shangri La on a Shoestring

Marcel had to leave for Peshawar for his return to Afghanistan. I thanked him for his company and for all his help, and I wished him a safe stay in Afghanistan. I then took a bus to the airport to see about a flight to Gilgit, the closest air destination to the Hunza. I purchased a ticket and waited for the next flight.

“Please wait here,” said the airport clerk. “We schedule flights to Gilgit daily but they are often cancelled due to storms in the mountains. This morning’s flight is due to leave soon and so far it is still go.”

This time I was lucky, and I was soon looking out of the plane’s window with awe at the seemingly endless panorama of snow covered peaks. What a huge alpine world this was. Northern Pakistan is home to K2, the world’s second highest peak, and to Nanga Parbat which, at over 8,100 meters, is one of the ten highest mountains in the world. I was told by a passenger that our little prop plane was flying past Nanga Parbat right then. To be honest, this outstanding mountain hardly stood out from the multitude of 7,000 meter-plus peaks that encompassed the entire eerie vista. Try as I might, I couldn’t discern which of the countless glaciers was the longest in the world outside the Polar Regions. I had difficulty imagining where our destination, Gilgit, could possibly be in this interminable white world, aptly known as ‘The Roof of the World’.

No sooner did I think this than we descended through that crystalline blue sky into Gilgit, the market town that serves as a stepping-off point for the Hunza and a few other isolated mountain communities. It is here that the Hunza River delivers her brown liquid bounty to the ever growing Indus. Orchards and rich farm lands provide the Gilgit market with a steady and diverse supply of fruits and vegetables. I stocked up before heading up to Karimabad. The Hunzas are self-sufficient in foodstuffs, but they don’t grow enough to supply all the needs of the ever increasing flow of visitors.

The journey back to Karimabad is only three hours on a good day, but we found our path blocked by more landslides so we had to spend one night in a village along the way.

Once back I booked myself into the very basic Hotel Karimabad. My room was just big enough for a single bed, gas lantern on makeshift table, and my backpack. At this point there was no electricity in the Hunza, although work was underway on a small scale hydro power station nearby. My little hotel had no running water, so each morning I simply broke the thin layer of ice that had formed overnight in the water channel that flowed past my room. A brief but invigorating wash followed.

What the accommodation lacked in modern comforts was more than made up for by the view. Many mornings were spent sitting on the narrow slab of concrete that ran the length of the four-room hotel. If the autumn sun became too hot, one need only dip one's feet in the icy water channel to cool off. Each morning three elderly Hunza men met on the step of a house perched on the mountainside directly below us. They would sit, still as mannequins, also seemingly absorbed by the view.

Far below, cutting a deep ravine in the lower valley, surged the Hunza River. The muted and distant roar of the river provided a constant background of ethereal sound. Mount Rakiposhi dominated the view to the south where the river and the Karakoram Highway wound their way towards Gilgit. The Nagar people lived on the opposite side of the river, and their homes and farms were easily seen under the towering domed Daran Peak. To the northeast loomed a huge undulating glacier with an enormous perpendicular rock face rising from it. This face was part of Golden Peak; the reason for its name was obvious late each afternoon as the last rays of the sun turned the rock on fire, a golden incandescence of splendor. Early each summer teams of rock climbers arrived, intent on ascending Golden Peak's incredible rock wall. And later each summer, these same teams of highly trained and skilled mountaineers returned home, humbled by this massive wall of rock, created by nature with a purpose other than to assuage the egos of western climbers.

I was humbled to watch these three upright aristocratic Hunza patriarchs sit long hours each day, rarely speaking, but obviously enraptured by the grandeur of their mountain home. They had spent their lives working in the shadow of these mountains, and they had earned the right to spend their twilight years at a more leisurely pace.

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Since the way to China was closed for the season, and since the temperatures at night often dropped below freezing, there were few Western visitors. As my days in this alpine paradise stretched into weeks I made friends with some of the hardy Westerners who did decide to visit. One such visitor was a young American woman, Julia. She too had left behind a successful career to pursue, for a time, the spiritual journey that these mountains seemed to inculcate. Her work designing clothing was replaced with travel and yoga study. She had, in fact, been regularly practicing yoga since the age of twelve, and she encouraged me to pursue my dreams of learning more about yoga and meditation.

Julia was reading sacred texts like Lao-tze's *Tao Te Ching*. I was humbled and deeply moved by the simplicity and wisdom of the words of this wise man. As we sat in the morning sun, Julia handed me her copy of the *Tao Te Ching*.

I laughed. "This seems like an awfully big book for a backpacker to be carrying."

"There are many translations of this book; in fact I think that next to the bible this is the most translated classic in the world. And this particular one by John Mitchell is worth the extra weight. It's my favorite."

"Where did the book come from?"

"Legend has it that Lao Tze was born in approximately 600 BC, not long before the time of the Buddha. He was a highly revered court librarian. Even Confucius, who was his contemporary, sought his advice. Despite being asked, he refused to write down his philosophy. He didn't want it to become rigid dogma. His whole approach involved going with the natural flow and order of things rather than forcing them."

"That sounds a bit like how you've described yoga. Is that why this book appeals to you?"

Julia swept back her long brown hair. As she smiled her nose, surrounded by a flotilla of faint freckles, crinkled in an attractive way, making her appear even younger than she was. "Perhaps. Again legend says that Lao-tze, saddened by the evil of men, set off into the desert on a water buffalo leaving civilization behind. When he arrived at the final gate at the great wall protecting the kingdom, the gatekeeper persuaded him to record the principles of his philosophy for posterity."

“And that’s what I’m holding now?”

“Yes, translated into English, of course. Every one of the eighty-one stanzas oozes with his poetic and seemingly conflicting way of explaining nature and the universe. I can read it over and over again. His words encourage me to observe and attempt to understand nature and nature’s laws. The way I interpret his words is that one must seek to live in harmony with all of creation and attempt to take a non-aggressive orientation to life; to use love, not force.”

“Julia, I love these words from one of the stanzas, ‘Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know.’ Some of our politicians could benefit from reading this book.”

Julia laughed. “That’s an interesting observation, John. The book was originally written as a set of guidelines for leaders on how to lead appropriately. Look at those men sitting below us. They don’t speak, but I’ll bet they know.”

Julia also carried a book about the Tibetans titled *In Exile from the Land of Snows* by John F. Avedon. An entire chapter was dedicated to Yeshi Dhonden, the fabled Tibetan doctor now in exile in northern India. After reading that chapter, I said to Julia, “If I don’t sort these periodic fevers I’ve had for the last few weeks in the next while, I’m going to track down Dr. Yeshi Dhonden and get help from him.”

Julia and I, occasionally in the company of other travelers, enjoyed long walks and picnics. There were forts and villages to explore. One could also climb the mountain slopes behind Karimabad to a cliffside water channel that brought the village water supply down through a steep canyon from the glaciers of Altit, Ultar and Lady Finger Peaks. It is the melt water from the snow and ice caps of this massif that supplies the irrigation channels that over centuries the Hunzas have painstakingly constructed and continue to maintain. It almost defies the imagination how these ingenious people have in some cases built these water channels along sheer perpendicular cliffs. It is the prime responsibility of some Hunza men to control the flow of irrigation water so that all terraced fields receive an ample and fair share of the water. Other men repair any damage to these channels and periodically clear out the settling ponds of sedimentation.

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Anyone who has been to the Hunza understands why there are settling ponds at regular points along water channels. The water from glacial melt gathers mica-like sediment as it flows through the upper plateaus that adjoin the glaciers. This sediment remains suspended in the water and swirls in vortices made visible by the suspended particles. The water is pure and sweet tasting, but it is almost palpably thick in minerals. The bluish-white water could be called glacial milk.

Julia and I met Alex, an experienced American alpine climber who had spent six months of each of the past five years in the Hunza.

"I'd have stayed year round if the Pakistani authorities had allowed me," he said.

Alex was a rich source of local information. He periodically guided Westerners on treks of varying length and difficulty in the surrounding mountains. In his spare time he climbed nearby 6,000 meter peaks, and he helped villagers in many ways. He recently brought a solar oven over from America. The family Alex stayed with baked bread in that oven each day, thereby relinquishing the need to touch the diminishing local wood resource. The forty-five-year-old father of this family was the former head chef for the Mir. We often enjoyed evening feasts prepared by him and his family at their small nearby hotel.

Alex walked us up to an area above the southern edge of Karimabad where the highest terraces bumped into the mountain slopes. Alex, tall and slim, was a striking figure with his light brown hair poking out from under a white woolen Hunza beret. He had a colorful scarf tied around his neck.

"I want you to see how the Hunzas create new fields on steep ground." Alex waved to a couple of ageless Hunza men who were stacking boulders on the barren slope above us. "They're building new rock terrace walls. When the walls are complete they'll divert a water channel to this new 'field', and then begin to periodically flood the field. Sediment, silt, and water soluble minerals will slowly settle, and step by step a layer of soil will be created."

"What about the people carrying soil in baskets?" Julia queried.

"People bring up sediment thousands of feet from the river in baskets. But patience and flooding will fill this field with soil. When deep enough the farmer will add animal manure and soil

enriching green crops, dig them in, and then begin to farm the field. Over thousands of years this entire mountain oasis has been created in this painstaking manner.”

One couldn’t help but be impressed with the ingenuity, hard work and perseverance of people who had transformed a forbidding rock-walled fortress into an earthly paradise.

Alex explained that the Hunza was, in essence, an alpine desert. There was very limited local precipitation, as little as two inches a year. The melt water was coming from glaciers that were formed prior to the last ice age and some scientists claim that this is the reason for the Hunza water’s legendary health-giving properties. American scientist Patrick Flanagan has documented research linking the average human life span in an area to the quality of that location’s drinking water supply.

Unfortunately the present snowfall levels are not enough to maintain the existing depths of snow and ice on the mountains. Theoretically, if current global warming trends continue, there could come a day when the Hunza’s glacial water supply dries up. Perhaps before that time enough trees will have been planted to create a permanent change in microclimate and an increase in precipitation—enough to restore and increase the diminishing glacial ice levels of today. I hope so.

“So That’s the Milky Way!”

Having no electric lighting made for enchanting evenings. One unforgettable dinner was shared with Alex and two women from New York City who were staying only one night in Karimabad. As I escorted them in the dark back to their hotel room, we stopped to look up at the twinkling night sky. The pristine mountain air, high altitude and lack of artificial lighting made it feel like you could almost touch the stars.

“What’s that whitish blur across the sky there?” asked one of the ladies.

“Why, that is the Milky Way,” I responded.

“So that’s the Milky Way!” exclaimed the other woman. “I’ve never seen it before.”

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What a mind expanding experience this must have been for these two city ladies. It was difficult for me to imagine not recognizing the Milky Way. I wonder how many other city people have missed this celestial spectacle.

We walked on slowly in the starlight, our eyes adjusting to the paucity of available light, rods and cones working overtime to illuminate the path.

During another lantern-lit evening meal with a few travelers, I expressed my plan to settle and live in a more or less self sufficient manner. A New Zealander at the table said, "I know just the place for that. It's called Takaka and it is found near Nelson at the very top of the South Island in New Zealand."

A few nights later over another evening meal a Dutch traveler said to me, "If I was looking to settle and live in a place where I could grow most of my own food I would choose Takaka in Golden Bay." I made a mental note to keep Takaka in mind for future travels.

This same Dutch traveler, in his early thirties, was a retired mountaineer. I spend some time walking and talking with him and his wife. I asked him why he was retired from climbing, he seemed so young.

He replied, "In the climbing world that I belonged to, you served your apprenticeship in the Alps. It was the dream of most of us to graduate to the more challenging climbing in the Himalayas of Nepal, India and Pakistan. I've done that. I've lived that life. I've been part of several expeditions to major peaks in the Himalayas. And I have watched my friends die one by one on these expeditions. I am the only one left alive from our original group. I feel it would be selfish of me to continue. I'm married now and I want to spend quality 'alive' time with my wife." He looked fondly at his wife. This couple seemed to be very comfortable together.

"Do the mountains continue to call you?" I asked.

"Yes. That's why we are here. But the mountains will have to be content with me walking in them, rather than climbing up them."

As I said earlier, the Hunza people are Ishmailis, followers of the Aga Khan, one of the world's richest men. Prince Karim Aga

Khan IV is the 49th hereditary Imam of the Ishmaili Muslims and is the direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through his cousin and son-in-law Ali, the first Imam, and his wife Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. The Aga Khan presides over widespread communities throughout the world including Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Some, like the Hunza, are situated in isolated mountain areas. The largest concentration of Ishmaili castles and communities can be found in what is now called Iran. There, the present day Imam's grandfather lived, as did many of his predecessors, until difficulties with the Shah led to his family's exile—first to Bombay, and eventually to France.

Hundreds of years ago, some Ishmailis were known as Assassins, but my interpretation of their present purpose is to protect various sacred mountain places such as the Hunza. Assassin castles originally communicated by beacon, so as to warn one another of impending attacks.

Towards the end of my Pakistan visa period, I heard from excited villagers that the Aga Khan was going to visit, something that only happened every few years. I decided to take a chance on overstaying my 30 day permit in order to witness the visit of this great man. Preparations had begun in earnest. A sort of decorative welcoming archway was constructed over Karimabad's only road. I was intrigued to see youths scampering up and down the mountainside above the village. What were they up to?

Julia and I happened to be hiking on a trail high above Karimabad when the helicopter carrying the Aga Khan and his small retinue arrived. He passed us as we trudged back into the village. He was riding in a motorcar, an older model with round fenders, the first I had seen in this isolated place. One usually saw only jeeps in Karimabad. The charismatic minibuses that plied the Karakorum Highway wouldn't dare make the steep ascent to the village from the river far below. The Aga Khan smiled as his car passed and for a moment our eyes met. Looking into those eyes was like looking into deep, fathomless pools that hinted at a wisdom connected with all that had come before, something unknown, but somehow knowable. I was deeply touched by the sincerity and kindness of that momentary glance.

People from several villages converged on a large open area where a temporary stage had been set up. The Imam's speech, in

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French, was immediately translated into Brusheski, the language of the Hunzas. He spoke of the equality of all religions, and of men and women. He stressed the importance of education for children, both boys and girls. He was no stirrer of fundamentalist pots. He was a broad-minded empathetic leader urging his people to move forward to a new century of hope and peace. The world needs more leaders like this.

That evening it became clear just what the young people had been preparing on the mountain slopes far above the village. As the flare of the last sun on Golden Peak turned to a deep russet hue, the first bonfires were lit on the rock-strewn mountain sides above the village. As darkness descended in the valley, the light of these fires seemed to symbolize the respect and joy of life this Hunza community embodied. May the fire of hope burn forever in their hearts and in the hearts of those of us lucky enough to have been touched by their lives.

The next day it snowed as a small group of villagers danced and played traditional music. The sounds produced by their simple flutes and stringed instruments were vaguely reminiscent of the songs of central Europe.

My visit to the Hunza was drawing to a close, and I would be leaving with great respect for these simple, hardy, and legendary mountain people.

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17

Seekers and Stupas

This time I stayed in a very basic room in the old, tumbledown, dusty and noisy part of Rawalpindi. I procured an entry permit for India within a couple of days and made my way by bus to Lahore. I rested at the Salvation Army Hostel. There were only a handful of other guests so the middle aged English couple running the hostel sat with us for some of the meals. They were refreshing, helpful souls whose lives were wholeheartedly dedicated to the service of anyone who came to them in need. Upon hearing of my regular fevers and chills they encouraged me to use malaria prophylactics and, to this end, they generously gave me some tablets. Although grateful for their concern, I decided to delay taking them. I had a growing feeling that I would find a natural solution to my deteriorating health.

At the border it soon became apparent that my overstayed Pakistan visitor permit was not a problem. But, once across the border, the Indian immigration officers delayed the bus for an hour attempting to coerce baksheesh from the wallets of unsuspecting or gullible travelers. At least this time I was prepared.

Pahar Ganj, New Delhi, November, 1987.

It is said that anything we like or dislike in another person is what we like or dislike in ourselves. I was sitting across from a man who wore a perpetual smile. He was young, mid-twenties perhaps, with a short brown beard and dreadlocks to his shoulders. He

wore a bright canary-yellow T shirt emblazoned with the universal symbol for peace. I loved his smile. It was real. He was one of those rare individuals who seemed naturally happy. This wasn't an alcohol or drug-induced euphoria. This man was high on fresh air and that was in itself a miracle. There was little or no fresh air to be breathed in New Delhi.

We shared only one conversation but his first question made it obvious he was another teacher magically placed in my path. We were seated in a cafe at a long table thrusting into the bedlam of Delhi's old quarter.

"Where were you at the time of the Harmonic Convergence?"

"It's funny you should ask. A month ago I wouldn't have been able to answer that. You're asking about August 16th and 17th this year?"

He nodded, smiling. A wide row of perfectly white teeth lit up the world.

I continued, "I was in Papua New Guinea. But I was blissfully unaware of the Harmonic Convergence. August 16th is my sister's birthday. I was probably thinking of her. I have a feeling you know exactly where you were and what you were doing at that time."

He laughed. "I was at Glastonbury. There were masses of people there. Quite a crowd. Somehow I ended up with a small group of sincere people who stayed up all night on the 15th. We were on a little hillock removed from the masses, most of whom were sleeping. A woman approached us in the night, I know not where from. She introduced herself as Shanti. That means peace in Sanskrit, you know.

"She was beautiful with straight brown hair and features that looked sort of Asian. She spoke perfect English but I couldn't place her accent. I know this may sound strange but she had an otherworldly appearance."

I thought back to my meeting with Jay and the serenity he had exuded. "Did you find out where she came from?"

"Not really. When one of us asked her she pointed vaguely into the sky.

"But she taught us songs and chants none of us had heard before. As I said, this group of maybe twelve people stayed up all night. I don't know about the others, but I wasn't tired at all.

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“We chanted until dawn on August 16th. Then this woman, Shanti, disappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as she had arrived. We were all buzzing. Nobody knew her or where she came from. At this point other people began to arrive and we no longer had the hillock to ourselves.” He hesitated a moment. “Do you believe in magic?”

“I believe there are things that happen that are not easily explained by science as we know it. I believe that we are often guided to meet people who tell us just what we need to know at the time. Is that what you mean by magic?”

“Yes. I suppose so. I can’t really explain in any conventional way where Shanti came from. But something special happened that night. I’m not the same person I was before that magic night at Glastonbury.”

“How did you end up at Glastonbury that night?”

“I’d read a little about Jose Arguelles, the man responsible for the worldwide Harmonic Convergence event. He’d studied the Mayan calendar and it was his dream to have people gather in sacred places all over the world at precisely dawn on August 16th. Glastonbury was one of the sacred locations and it’s a place I had visited many times before. It seemed natural to go there. But there were other people who chose to go to Stonehenge. And groups gathered in special spots around the world like Ayer’s Rock, Mount Shasta, Jericho Beach, Teotihuacan, Giza and Macchu Pichu.”

“A month ago I met a man who’d been part of it in Mount Kailash in Tibet. I couldn’t even get into Tibet, but he somehow managed to spend a long time there. He went specifically for the Harmonic Convergence.”

“I’m not surprised. I’ve heard that Mount Kailash is an extraordinarily powerful and sacred place.”

“What exactly was the purpose of gathering together?”

“Jose Arguelles believes peaceful transformation of the planet and environmental harmony can occur when humanity learns to embrace Mayan time knowledge based on the twenty eight day Thirteen Moon Calendar. I was participating to add my little bit to making the world a more peaceful place. Did you know that the destruction of the Mayan time knowledge was completed by a

Vatican calendar ‘reform’ in the late 1500s which gave us the solar calendar we use today?”

“I didn’t know that, but as far as I know a lunar calendar is still used throughout the Islamic world today.”

“Yes. And in Tibet and China and in other traditional cultures. What’s your name?”

“John.”

“You know, John, that after the Harmonic Convergence I felt a strong urge to visit India for the first time. But I had no savings. Then a strange thing happened.”

“What was that?” I had the feeling that anything was possible with this man.

“My boss won with a lottery ticket and he paid for two round trip tickets to India for my girlfriend and me. That’s how I came to be sitting here with you.”

“There are no coincidences, are there?”

“I don’t think so.” If anything his smile was even brighter than it had been before. “There’s one more thing I’d like to tell you, John. The Mayan calendar ends in the year 2012.”

“How can that be?”

“I don’t know exactly. That year and the time leading up to it is called something like ‘End Time’ or ‘The End of Time as We Know It’. It is supposedly another extremely important date for the evolution of the planet. A Mayan prophet foretold of this date as an opportunity for people to return to natural time and more natural ways of living. I wonder where you and I will be in 2012?”

“I don’t know about me, but something tells me you’ll be in a sacred place in England called Glastonbury. You might even meet a woman named Shanti there.”

“Wouldn’t that be cool.”

I stopped in Delhi long enough to obtain a Nepalese visitor permit and to accompany a new Spanish friend to yoga classes held at the crack of dawn in a nearby temple. We were the only non-Indians there. All the men gathered in a bleak room with a concrete floor. The women, I found out later, were jammed into a similar room next door. The teacher of the men, an exceedingly flexible man in his fifties, led us through a series of postures. He

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spoke in Hindi so we could only go by his physical example. We were squashed into the room like sardines. Remarkably, men were not bumping into each other. I felt extremely inadequate in my feeble attempts at this new art. Actually it seemed more like gymnastics than anything else. I was encouraged to move my limbs in ways that a lifetime of inflexibility made arduous at best. While the others bent and folded their bodies with the suppleness of callow willows, my body responded with the rigidity of an aging oak; and I was one of the youngest participants. I was relieved when this ritual was over. Outside, in the early morning sun, men and woman joined in swallowing long, slender strips of cotton.

“What are they doing that for?” I asked my Spanish guide.

“That is an ancient way of cleaning out the entire digestive tract.”

The whole experience was all a little too exotic for me. I determined that I would wait until I found a more approachable method of yoga. But not now. It was time to return to my beloved mountains and so I proceeded by bus to Nepal. During the journey I reflected on my previous visit to this spectacular Himalayan land.

Chitwan

Southern Nepal, October, 1984.

My journey to Chitwan National Park has been a long one. It seems like forever since I said goodbye to Peter, my colleague from Saudi Arabia, at the bus station in Pokhara after our amazing nine day trek up the ridge leading to Mount Machapuchare and back. Machapuchare (meaning ‘fish tail’ due to the shape of its peak) is one of the few places on earth reserved for the gods. In 1957, after a British expedition was forced to turn back just below the summit, the Nepalese government honored the holy status the mountain had always held for the people living in its shadow and

stopped issuing climbing permits for it. To this day it remains one of the few major unclimbed Himalayan peaks.

Two long and numbing bus trips followed by a relatively short twilight hop on a trishaw bring me palpably close to my destination, situated in the hot, sticky plains of southern Nepal, near the Indian border. It is a disturbing contrast to the fresh, cool mountain hinterland I have left behind.

Darkness descends. After repeated and unsuccessful enquiries for a taxi from the closest village to the park, it becomes apparent that I will need to complete the last part of this journey on foot. I get directions, keeping my fingers crossed that they are reliable, and walk out of town. In this part of the world people often give directions that are incorrect rather than saying they don't know.

After the grueling hours of bus travel this walk in the quiet countryside comes as a relief to my cramped and stiff legs. Once beyond the dim glow of the village lamps, darkness is complete. There is no moon and the sultry atmosphere of the day is replaced with the pitch-dark of an unlit cave. As my father was wont to say, 'It's darker than the inside of a cow.' With small, careful steps I advance, seeking the road on the right that will lead to the park, as I have been advised. In this utter darkness I have no choice but to trust. Turning back to the village seems a paltry alternative.

Eventually, guided by the faint lamps of two country houses, I find the anticipated turnoff. I continue to inch along in this black, sticky soup. With vision reduced to a few feet my other senses are heightened. I can almost smell the mystery of the place.

I nearly jump out of the soup when a male voice calls out in heavily accented but clear English, "Watch out, rhino." These simple folk obviously assume that it must be a stupid foreigner wandering around in the dark.

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What does that mean? *I wonder. Somewhat more nervously I carry on. One blessing is that the road is dead flat and perfectly straight. Ten minutes later another disembodied masculine voice calls out from a house set well back from the road, "Careful. Rhino."*

Every part of me is awake. What should I do now? Feeling that I am past the point of no return, I continue to tread carefully forward. My steps are light and my heart is heavy. I feel like a blindfolded prisoner forced to walk the plank in a becalmed sea; each step in the darkness bringing me closer to a predetermined fate.

I surrender to the situation, only to stumble as my smooth and invisible path suddenly drops down. I creep carefully forward until I reach water. I grope left and right, but there is no obvious bridge. No one told me about a river. To walk into a black unknown body of water is too much. Determined as I am, I know I have to turn back.

Fortunately, there is a well-lit house a little further back on the right side of the path. Towards this I tiptoe, acutely listening for the tell tale sounds of a large animal, thankful to have a destination with living, breathing people in sight. As I near the house I hear voices and one calls out, "Did the rhino scare you?"

This voice belongs to an Englishman who sits together with three Nepali men at a candlelit table in an open, primitive dwelling. My eyes adjust to the light and I begin to discern more details. I can see that this long haired man is about forty. Perhaps he is one of the aging hippies still to be found in Nepal.

"Hi. Namaste. How do I get to Chitwan National Park?" I ask tentatively.

"You'll have to wade through the river. It's not very deep," the Englishman answers. "But I wouldn't recommend a crossing at this time of night. Just yesterday evening a local man was attacked by a rhino that had left the confines of the park in search of easy eating in people's

gardens. The man is still alive, but should he recover, he will be scarred for life."

I sigh, "That's why some people called out to me about a rhino." I suddenly don't want to take another step.

"Yes, the locals are a little on edge."

"So is this visitor," I say, sitting down on the proffered stool.

"Tell you what. I'll see if these people can put you up for the night."

"I'd really appreciate that."

These men share some of their rice and lentils with me and then the Nepali farmer leads me to my simple lodgings—a horizontal plank in the chicken coop. It seems like the Ritz to me. This is no time to be choosy. I am hugely grateful for a safe place to lie down and I sleep soundly until a rooster decides to serenade my coop-mates just before dawn.

It is amazing to see how fresh and safe and innocent the landscape appears in the light of day. After paying my hosts I make the short walk to the river, removing my hiking boots and tentatively beginning the crossing. The water is only about knee deep and the current is minimal. Still, I am glad I have waited until daytime. There isn't a rhino in sight. It's a short, easy stroll to basic, backpacker accommodation on the edge of the park and forest. After settling into the dark and filthy room (the chicken coop definitely seems like the Ritz compared to this dive), I make the short walk to the museum and ranger's station within the park itself. The museum has photos of local Maharajas and statistics of the huge numbers of tigers shot decades before. The massive population explosion on the Indian subcontinent has seen a coincidental colossal reduction in numbers of indigenous animals and their forest habitat. Chitwan is but a tiny remnant of the jungle and swamp that used to run the entire length of southern Nepal. The mighty Bengal Tiger and the Indian Lion, at

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the top of the food chain, are now found cloistered and vulnerable in this and a few other Lilliputian refuges. It is no wonder that neighboring farmers and villagers live in perpetual fear of the few remaining large mammals. It is not unusual for these forest giants to make brief excursions beyond the man-made perimeters one can hardly expect them to honor.

I arrange to walk with a ranger into the park to view wildlife. It's possible to hire an elephant but the price differential is enormous. The khaki clad young ranger and I set out on a well worn path that skirts the jungle. After a short time my guide points to the surrounding grassland, and there, less than twenty-five meters away, grazes a mother rhino and her calf. I suddenly feel very vulnerable on foot. This is no zoo with a sturdy fence delineating an animal enclosure. The ranger gestures that he will be back soon and motions that I should climb a tree if the rhino decides to get inquisitive. He then leaves, presumably to find a private place to answer the call of nature. I feel even more unprotected as I crouch silent and motionless watching these beautiful, leathery creatures. I can imagine how rhinos were used like tanks in ancient warfare, as no arrow could pierce their armor-like sides.

He must have a good bladder, I think as my guide takes his time in returning. Nerves are getting the better of my bladder. I chide myself for not hiring an elephant. I try to relax, breathing deeply and slowly. It is then that I notice that the jungle behind me is far from quiet. Without its accompanying din I must surely hear the pounding of my overanxious heart.

I am extremely relieved when the ranger returns. I am no longer quite so confident when he asks me to follow him on the path that winds into the jungle. Our interchanges consist mostly of gestures, grunts, and sign language since neither of us can converse in the other's language. The squawks and songs of birds and the

chattering of monkeys and other unseen creatures reverberate through the trees. We stand for a long while, raptly observing the playful antics of an extended family of monkeys. I have always been fascinated by these furry relatives of man. This group appears to be on a food-seeking mission as they swing and jump effortlessly from tree to tree.

Suddenly a mighty, primitive roar shakes the forest and all is immediately silent. The monkey clan slips surreptitiously into the jungle away from the source of the roar. I am awestruck and amazed at the jungle creatures' unilateral response of silence to this single, antediluvian bellow from the forest king, the tiger. Inexplicably, my earlier fears have vanished. I am tempted to stand here all day, swept up in the majesty and power that this creature, with one primordial sound, has exuded. I am struck dumb as the lingering vibrations wash over me, seemingly saying, 'I still stand alone at the pinnacle of the animal kingdom.'

My guide tugs at my sleeve to get my attention. His eyes bespeak fear and urgency and he whispers, "We go." I am tempted to stay, but his response mirrors that of the other silent, hidden jungle residents. Better to slink safely away than to risk an encounter with a hungry tiger, I suppose. We walk swiftly along the track and, in time, as no follow-up roar is heard, the colossal jungle cacophony resumes. After a brief pause to watch two elephants bathing in the river we, one gladly and the other reluctantly, return to the safety of the park headquarters.

For one magical moment I have felt something that would have cast fear and wonder in the hearts of my ancient forebears. This experience transcends anything I have encountered growing up in Ontario. It feels as if this one brief instant has reawakened some ancestral human instincts that have been lying dormant, untouched within me. Somehow, the roar of the tiger has opened a part of me to an unfathomable mystery. Perhaps this is a part

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that was one with the wild, with the unwritten history of the planet. Is this what exerts its pull on mountaineers, causing them to risk their lives over and over? Is this what attracts visitors to the game parks of Africa or to the last wild places at the ends of the earth?

Back at my lodgings I meet a young English couple who convince me to join them on an elephant tour of the park that afternoon. It is worth it. To sit atop the largest terrestrial animal on earth while a rhinoceros family grazes placidly at our feet is exquisite. Was this how the maharajas felt years ago?

We are completely safe. What a beautiful, non-polluting way to view wildlife. Elephants, for all their bulk, are remarkably agile. Our guide, obviously proud of his elephant friend, tosses a coin to the ground. The elephant deftly picks it up and drops it into his trainer's hand.

The tiger does not return.

The next morning, early, I join this same English couple in a taxi back to town where we catch a bus for the six hour trip to Kathmandu.

"Have you ever ridden on the top of a Nepali bus?" one of my new friends asks.

"No."

"It can be fun and it's a lot less crowded. Let's do it."

So we climb the outer ladder and arrange our backpacks as best we can. It's a bumpy ride. My friends pull out a set of magnetic travel games but we soon tire of the futility of keeping the board steady. We relax into pleasant conversation and enjoy the country scenery as the road winds gradually into the foothills of the Himalayas.

After a halfway toilet stop, men spread out along the roadside in front of the bus and women crouched behind, we reclaim our coveted positions on the rooftop. We are sitting engrossed in conversation when a man scampers up the outer ladder and wildly motions for us to get down, immediately. We flatten out against the rooftop. Not a

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moment too soon, as our prone bodies and the bus just pass under an electrical cable. If we hadn't been decapitated we would surely have been swept from our speeding transport had we come in contact with the wire. After that scare we decide to jam into the bus for the last part of the trip into Kathmandu. We trade off the staler air of the bus's interior for the relative safety here amidst the jostling villagers, chickens, all manner of baskets and colorful bags.



18

Siddhartha

SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA, THE AWAKENED ONE, RECOUNTED HIS OWN story to his disciple Ananda. Through countless lives he was a bodhisattva, one on the path of awakening, who labored and sacrificed for the benefit of all beings. Finally, in a past age of the world, as a forest dwelling ascetic named Sumedha, he threw himself at the feet of an earlier Buddha, Dipankara, and determined to become a Buddha himself.

In the middle of the first millennium BC the country of the Shakyas, in what is today southern Nepal, was ruled by King Shuddhodana and his noble wife Mahamaya. One night during the midsummer festival in Kapilavastu, Queen Mahamaya received a propitious dream and knew that she was pregnant with a great being. The king called his Brahmin wise men that were versed in astrology and the interpretation of dreams. They told the king that he was to have a son with momentous potential. If he remained in the palace and lived a worldly life he would become a universal monarch. If he renounced his worldly life, his home, wealth and position, he would become a completely enlightened Buddha.

Mahamaya's pregnancy lasted 10 months. In the springtime, with birth imminent, she asked to be taken to Lumbini, a pleasure grove she had loved as a child. On the full moon day the bodhisattva was born instantly and painlessly as the queen held a branch during a walk through the grove. Already in the form of a small boy, the bodhisattva took seven firm steps, looked to the four directions and declared verbally, "I am the leader of the world, the guide of the world. This is my final birth."

A great rishi named Asita was living alone and practicing meditation in the mountains. He saw inwardly that a great being had arrived somewhere in the world. He divined the location and visited the palace. Here, after seeing the child and the auspicious signs on the youngster's body, he prophesied identical possible destinies, as the Brahmin astrologers had earlier declared.

Seven days after the Buddha's birth, Queen Mahamaya died. In his grief, the king contemplated the Brahmins' predictions of greatness for his son. King Shuddhodana determined to do everything in his power to encourage his son to succeed him and become a universal monarch, rather than following the life of a holy man and leaving the king without an heir.

Thus began a life of opulence for the boy prince named Siddhartha, meaning 'accomplishment of the goal'. He lived mainly in the luxurious upper rooms and lushly planted roof gardens of three seasonal palaces, surrounded by a bevy of beauties skilled in singing, dancing and playing musical instruments. As part of his father's continued conspiracy to bind him to a worldly life, Siddhartha was married at the age of sixteen to Yashodhara, the beautiful and dignified daughter of a Shakyian noble family. For the next dozen years the prince's pampered life continued unabated through the three seasons, surrounded by beautiful women who captivated him with music, song and sexual pleasures.

Siddhartha had a charioteer named Chandaka who occasionally took him on outings, always well orchestrated by the king and his charges. The way would be decorated and anything ugly or unpleasant would be carefully removed so as to avoid disturbing the prince's mood.

In his late twenties, the prince commanded Chandaka to take him to a particular garden for the afternoon. Along the way they encountered a feeble old man, the sight of which shocked and frightened Siddhartha. After hearing Chandaka's explanation that all men will reach this fate sooner or later, the distraught prince asked to be returned to the palace. King Shuddhodana heard of his son's fateful journey and redoubled his efforts by ordering more elaborate entertainments for his son and more guards to watch the palace. Despite his father's efforts Siddhartha, on a subsequent chariot journey, encountered a man suffering a

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disfiguring disease. Parts of his body were swollen and other parts covered with sores. He was supported by another man and occasionally called out in pain. Upon being questioned, Chandaka explained what disease was to Siddhartha, who again asked to be returned immediately to the palace.

On a third trip with Chandaka, the prince saw a corpse being borne on a litter followed by wailing relatives. Chandaka explained death to Siddhartha closing with the words, "Without exception, everything that is born must die." Siddhartha was deeply disturbed and his father doubled the guard to prevent the prince's departure. King Shuddhodana was about to learn a lesson that any child learns who attempts to stop a stream with sticks, stones and sand. Destiny, like water impelled by gravity or the arrow sailing forth from the bow, unfolds inexorably to its destination.

The bodhisattva managed a fourth chariot trip with Chandaka. This time he encountered an upright, serene and radiant saddhu. Siddhartha was impressed and asked Chandaka to explain about this man. Chandaka replied, "This is a holy man who has renounced worldly life. Some homeless mendicants devote themselves to spiritual pursuits such as meditation or practicing austerities. They have no possessions but wander from place to place, begging their daily food."

A seed was sown in the prince. The stage was set. Siddhartha returned to the palace deep in thought.

Shortly after, a son was born to Yashodhara and Siddhartha, and soon after this the bodhisattva chose to leave the palace for good, vowing to see his son and wife again only after he had attained enlightenment. With the assistance of Chandaka he departed at night when all, including the guards, were asleep. Siddhartha was twenty nine years old.

Before sending Chandaka back to the palace, the bodhisattva borrowed his servant's sword and cut off his hair. He gave all his precious possessions to Chandaka and exchanged his royal garments for the saffron dyed robe of a passing deer hunter. In the blinking of an eye, Siddhartha was transformed from prince to beggar. Wandering penniless, he learned to eat the simplest of food offered and he sought out spiritual teachers living in the forest or countryside. He quickly attained the level of

understanding of the great teachers he studied with. Moving on he then purposefully confronted his fears in remote and wild places. Next he took up the life of an ascetic, undergoing hardships to subdue the ego. He practiced progressively more difficult exercises of breath control, and fasted until he was so impoverished his belly skin touched his spine and his hair literally rotted away. He ardently sought, through sacrifice of the body, liberation from life and death. News of his seeking spread and he attracted five fellow homeless mendicants who attended to his meager needs and awaited eagerly the day when he would attain enlightenment.

After nearly six years of this tortuous way of living had passed, Siddhartha was close to death. Worn out by fasting, leaning against a tree, he heard a teacher of music talking to his pupils in a nearby grove: "If the strings of a lute are too taut, they snap or emit discordant notes. Too slack, and the sound is no longer right. The instrument must be exactly in tune to produce its music."

On hearing this Siddhartha finally realized he would not attain liberation in a body tortured to the point of expiration. He accepted rice cooked with cream and sweetened with wild honey from Sujata, a young peasant woman who had just given birth.

When the bodhisattva had regained his strength he betook himself to the edge of the River Niranjana and entered the water. Having bathed his body, he left the water, climbed the bank and went to a tree of his choosing. Sitting upon a cushion of kusa grass, Siddhartha resolved to sit at the foot of this sacred tree until he had attained enlightenment, even if it cost him his life. He sat thus for seven days and seven nights, confronted by and finally conquering Mara, the embodiment of self-deception. Ignorance ceased and wisdom emerged. He obtained pure and perfect deliverance and became the Buddha, the Blessed One.

His first disciples were the five mendicants he had left earlier on his path to discovering what he was to call 'The Middle Way' and liberation. He spent the rest of his many years as the Awakened One teaching his Noble Eightfold Path of perfect view, perfect resolve, perfect speech, perfect conduct, perfect livelihood, perfect effort, perfect mindfulness and perfect concentration. That teaching continues today, two thousand five hundred years later.

In the Footsteps of the Buddha

The Buddha was a prince, and he left the palace. He stepped out of the pattern he had grown into and set out on a journey of discovery from which he never returned. He might have been discouraged and beaten and fallen back on the easy life, or been sidetracked from his purpose; instead he completed his quest. The Buddha discovered the reality behind the illusion we call life.

A prince completely awoke from all dreams and became a Buddha, an Awakened One. If he could complete the journey, couldn't others, with steadfast focus and determination avoid the pitfalls and sidetracks and, too, reach the destination of enlightenment for the liberation of all beings? His story shone like an iridescent gemstone; his heroic saga gave me hope. I also chose to leave the patterns of life behind that had, until recently, comfortably sustained and nurtured me. Like the Buddha and countless others before me, I chose to leave the illusion of security behind in order to seek out the reality and meaning of life.

Making the decision to step outside the box of comfort and familiarity was one thing. Actually taking the steps was another. Often the steps were faltering at best. But footsteps in the sands of time are not made by sitting down.

“Is That You Dean?”

Kathmandu, December, 1988.

I was astounded by the huge growth in vehicular and pedestrian traffic in Kathmandu since my last visit four years earlier. To a certain extent, the crumbling medieval structures were now obscured by a curtain of smog and noise. Sadly, Kathmandu appeared to be following other Asian cities into rapid modernization and expansion. Perhaps this was a boon to locals, but to me, it represented more disappointing development. Previously I had been attracted to the timeless simplicity of the city, with its temples, mendicants and holy men. These were still

here, but one had to wade through a complex caravanserai of congested traffic to find them.

The Kathmandu Guest House of my previous visit was a little up market for my backpacking budget so I settled into a large, well kept and sunny semi-rural two story guest house on the opposite side of town. My room on the second floor was massive by Asian standards and contained two single beds, two chairs and a simple wooden table. There were restful views over the green patchwork of grassy fields and mud plastered farm houses. The river ran slowly below, cut deeply into the red alluvial soil. The toilet wasn't far down the narrow hallway, in easy proximity for my nocturnal peregrinations.

The quiet guest house turned out to be an excellent location, as it was within easy walking distance of Durbar Square and the central part of the city. I could walk there via Freak Street, so named because it had been the enclave of dope smoking hippies and spiritual seekers in the heydays of the 60s and 70s. Little remained of those almost fabled times. One could now find restaurants specializing in cakes or even pizzas for Westerners. The food tasted good but the water used by all restaurants came from the river flowing through town, a river that served as washbasin and toilet for the rapidly expanding population of Kathmandu. It was a dubious source of liquid nourishment. No wonder many travelers came down with tummy trouble, which could be dubbed 'Nepali Nightmare'.

I spent my days wandering the dusty streets seeking leads on where I could study meditation. My efforts were eventually rewarded when I found there was a six week residential Tibetan Buddhist course to begin soon near the famous stupa in Boudanath. I booked in for the course. I spent the remainder of my time outside as much as possible, soaking up the sunshine and crisp, clear late autumn air in the unpolluted Kathmandu Valley. I savored the spiritual dissimilitude of a population that lived up to the saying: 'There are as many gods as there are people and as many temples as there are dwellings in the Valley of Kathmandu'.

I caught up on correspondence despite knowing there was always a risk in sending post from Kathmandu. It was important for me to post these missives to family and friends, to write of my adventures in this ancient land. I knew I would receive few

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replies. With my mobile lifestyle, it was difficult for those back home to post a letter in time to reach the next American Express office address I had sent them. Such were the days prior to today's instantaneous internet communication. The email was still but a dream.

I hired a bicycle that seemed almost as ancient as the Monkey Temple I cycled to. Before returning home I settled onto a sunny roadside verge and read a dog-eared second hand copy of Richard Bach's *Illusions* from cover to cover for the first time. I had found the paperback while passing through Delhi.

The next day I read the book again. What an amazing, succinct, wisdom-filled book.

Sitting down to lunch with some fellow travelers at a popular restaurant on Freak Street, I was struck by the familiarity of a lone traveler seated nearby. The thick, wavy blonde hair. The strong, broad shouldered physique of a body builder. Bewitched, I got up to see if this human mirage could possibly be who I thought it was.

"Dean. Is it really you?" I asked as I approached his table. He looked up, not immediately recognizing me. After all, I was now a slimmer, beardless version of the man he had shared a tent with in Scandinavia almost two-and-a-half years before.

His eyes betrayed a dawning of incredulity mixed uncomfortably with recollection.

Tremulously, he asked, "John?"

"Yes. In the flesh," I smiled. I was enjoying his response to seeing a ghost from his past.

"The last time I saw you I thought you were a goner. This is amazing! Would you like to join me?"

"Absolutely. I'd be honored. I'll be right back." I intercepted the waiter and my meal, and I apologized to the travelers I had been sitting with. I sat down across from Dean.

"God. I can still hardly believe this!" Dean stared at me, almost as if he was seeing a real ghost. I loved his South African accent and his rich, round melodic voice.

"Pretty amazing, isn't it. Dean, there are no coincidences," I said. "What brings you here? I would have thought you'd still be working in London."

"I was for a while. I shared a flat with Stan from our trip and did more laboring. He and I went down to Pamplona together to run with the bulls. Then I got the urge to return to Cape Town to see my parents. It had been long enough. They had shifted to a new house and I stayed with them for a few months and painted the whole place for them. Then I decided it was time to explore Asia. Where have you been?"

I briefly filled him in on my wanderings in the two-and-a-half years since we had seen each other in Norway. "I visited Maree in Melbourne and she took me to her parents' home in some little town near there. I also visited with Sue's parents and her sister in a place called Kalgoorlie in Western Australia."

I paused, wondering if I should open up further to Dean. *Why not?* I thought, *Something has brought us together again.*

"You know, Dean," I explained. "Something changed in me after I survived the meningitis in Norway. I have been traveling so that I can get more answers, so that I can more deeply understand life and my reasons for being here. I've been given a fresh opportunity, a second chance, and I want to make the most of it."

"In what way, John?"

"For example, rather than simply reading an exciting novel just for enjoyment, I now read for the profound pleasure of discovery. Take this little book by Richard Bach, for instance. This book is so full of wisdom." I handed him my travel worn and well read copy of *Illusions*.

"Wow," interjected Dean after leafing through the book. "What's the gist of the story, John?"

"I won't give it away, but one idea that I really resonate with is that we are here to learn and have fun. I don't know about you, but that has been my experience traveling. I'm learning and having fun at the same time."

"I would agree with that," said Dean. "Together with a few uncomfortable bus trips in between."

We laughed.

"John. Do you think I could borrow this?"

"Of course."

"It sounds like your journey is remarkably similar to mine. When I got back to South Africa I found out that my mother had also begun a search for the deeper spiritual elements in life. It was

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encouraging to be able to share these ideas with her. In Cape Town I found a center for a kind of meditation based on inner sound and light. It is called Eckankar and the purpose is to know your soul."

Later, Dean easily hefted his huge pack onto his muscled shoulders and we walked back to my guest house. Passing Nepalese turned to stare at Dean.

"I wish they wouldn't do that," he said with a hint of irritation. "Why do they stare?"

"They're not accustomed to seeing someone as big as you," I replied. "They probably think you're a movie star from an action film."

We arranged with the guest house owner for Dean to share my room. He stayed for several days. I no longer wondered why I'd had a spare bed.

Dean and I ventured by bus to Kopan, a teaching monastery above Boudanath that was a favorite haunt of Westerners. Two Tibetan lamas had jointly presided over the monastery until one of them died a few years before. Not long after his passing, with the aid of an oracle, a search was launched for the next incarnation, or tulku, of this lama. The search ventured far and wide and eventually a young boy was located in Spain, of all places. His parents were encouraged to bring their child to Nepal to begin his monastic training early, as is customary in these cases. Dean and I watched with fascination as the boy lama played contentedly with wooden blocks and a few simple toys. The only word the toddler enunciated was 'gompa', as he pushed a toy car into a simple structure made of blocks. 'Gompa' is Tibetan for 'monastery' or 'temple'.

Rinpoche from Rumtek

I bade Dean farewell and ventured to another gumpa, situated near the famed stupa in Boudanath, to begin my residential course in Tibetan Buddhism. The Boudanath Stupa is the largest Buddhist structure in Nepal, and has been a place of power and an important site of pilgrimage since its construction. On their way north out of the Kathmandu Valley, caravans of salt traders, monks, lamas and others made an obligatory stop here to perform protection and prosperity rituals. Nepalese historians trace the construction of the stupa to the early reign of Manadeva who ruled Nepal in the fifth century. Others say the stupa is far older and may even predate Buddha.

I shared a spacious room in the two story white washed concrete building with Paul, an Irish Buddhist, who, like many of the twenty or so course participants, had flown a great distance to study with Thrangu Rinpoche, renowned lama and former Abbott of Rumtek Monastery in Bhutan.

We quickly settled into a routine. After a shared breakfast we made our way to a nearby monastery for teachings by the Rinpoche, skillfully translated from Tibetan into English by a British man in his forties who was obviously very familiar with the esoteric terminology being used. Each session began with the students prostrating (bowing) before the lama. Three of us were not Buddhists (although the other two, one American and one German, did eventually take their vows) and we refrained from prostrating. Frankly, I found it demeaning to consider oneself inferior to someone else by bowing before them without receiving a bow in return. I was quite happy to learn from this man and I deeply respected his knowledge in Tibetan Buddhism. But I did and still do consider all humans as my equals. I will gladly seek out the wisdom of some, and avoid the immaturity of others. But in my considered opinion, deep, deep down, we are all one.

I befriended several of the other students including Lee, a cheerful Californian who had lived in Nepal during the hippie heydays of the early seventies. Lee had an American friend from those days, a homeopath who continued to live in the country. This man resided with his beautiful Nepalese wife, and their home

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happened to be within walking distance of where we were staying. Lee took me to their home. This friend used muscle testing to diagnose, and homeopathy to treat, my diarrhea. He determined that I had weakness in my liver. Despite his skilful remonstrations, the diarrhea persisted.

I discovered that many of my fellow students, these Western Buddhists, had strong aversions to their strict Christian upbringings. I found it more than a little ironic that they now opted for another religion that was at least as ritualistic as that which they so vehemently rejected.

Weekends were free. One Sunday was given over to the study of the basics of Tibetan Medicine at a spacious and modern dwelling on the outskirts of Kathmandu. I attended with two of my new friends from Thrangu Rinpoche's course. The causes of diseases were outlined from the Tibetan Medical perspective and hierarchically depicted. Some causes, lower on the pyramid, were obvious such as improper feeding or environmental toxins. These created imbalances in the body. What startled me in its veracity and simplicity was that according to Tibetan Medicine the root of all illness is 'lack of awareness'. In one transcendent moment I could see that the search for truth and health were intimately interwoven and, essentially, inseparable. In that instant, I silently vowed that I would dedicate every day of the rest of my life to increasing my awareness of the inner and outer worlds.

After this I visited a Tibetan doctor who had a room in Boudanath. He prescribed some herbal tablets, roughly spherical, hard and brown, not unlike rabbit droppings. The diarrhea persisted.

One afternoon we all visited an aging Tibetan patriarch at a nearby monastery. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche was one of the mentors of the present day Dalai Lama. He sat cross-legged and shirtless with swept-back and thinning white hair, as we humbly approached him one by one. He graciously accepted the white scarves (kata) we had been instructed to give him. Each kata was placed around our necks, returned to us by this large man with an incomparable smile. His presence bespoke a noble simplicity and joy.

The short visit to this saint marked the beginning of the end for me on my residential course. I became increasingly disenchanted

with what I perceived to be rigid teachings of suffering and intimately described hell realms, all steeped in superfluous ritual. I had come to learn about meditation and found, instead, seemingly endless intellectualizing. Was Truth this complicated? I had glimpsed something else in the face of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche: an unspoken and unexplainable simplicity of being that, I suspected, could not be taught, only experienced. This was what I sought.

I decided it was time to move on, but not before celebrating New Years by making circumambulations of the Boudanath Stupa on a crystal clear and chilly night, watched over by countless glittering stars. We lit butter lamps alongside penniless Tibetan pilgrims. This was a ritual I gladly embraced. Walking back to our accommodation in the comforting darkness before the first dawn of a new year I remarked to my companions, "This is suffering!"

I shared a final breakfast with my fellow students and with a middle aged American man, a friend of Lee's, who had arrived directly from the airport and an overseas flight the previous night. He was tall, with a thick head of brown hair. He too was heading into Kathmandu so we shared a taxi into town.

"I haven't been in Nepal for more than ten years and things have changed enormously since that time. Have you any suggestions for budget accommodation?" he asked me as our cab navigated the overfull streets of the city. I replied in the affirmative and then disembarked with this man amidst the teaming and colorful throngs. I escorted him to the Kathmandu Guest House in Thamel, and then walked through the ancient heart of Durbar Square to the familiar Freak Street area where I knew I would be able to book a bus to Patna in Bihar. I had been told by Paul of a Vipassana Meditation Retreat that was due to start in Bodhgaya in a few days. He reckoned it would better suit my requirements of simplicity and the direct experience of the Truth. But first I had to wait for the evening departure of a bus to the border.



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Vipassana or Bust

“Do you mind if I join you?” asked the American man I had escorted to the hotel on the other side of the city just two hours before. I was sitting, writing in my journal, in the same restaurant where I had so auspiciously met Dean some weeks before. What was it about this restaurant that invited such propitious encounters?

“Of course,” I replied. “Let me introduce myself. My name is John.”

“And mine is Bill,” said this man with his deep and resonant voice. I guessed that he was approaching fifty. He had wavy brown hair and a solid, handsome face that seemed a perfect match for that rich radio voice of his.

For the next two hours he described his vision of taking handicapped people trekking in the Himalayas and he plied me with questions about the trekking I had done a few years before. Aside from my brief answers he did all the talking. He was in the country to check out the feasibility of this dream that he had been playing with for a few years. He was also looking for guides for this venture and asked me if I would be interested. I felt that I was too inexperienced but gave him my parents’ contact address just in case.

As he got up to leave Bill said, “I live in a beautiful place in the American South West. If you are ever that way, look me up. I’m only going to be in Nepal for a few weeks and then I’ll be home. Do you have an address book with you?”

I nodded affirmatively and handed it to him. He wrote down his address and phone number and I put the little book away.

After an early dinner I made my way to the bus depot and there, standing in the shade of a stately tree was another Westerner.

"Hi. I'm Jeff," he introduced himself, shaking my hand. "Where are you headed?"

"My name is John," I replied. "I'm on my way to Bodhgaya where I've heard a Vipassana Meditation Retreat is about to begin."

"That's interesting," smiled Jeff. "I'm just over from Vancouver to go to that very retreat. I went to one there last year with Chris Titmus, who leads them. He's very good. He's English and used to be a Buddhist monk."

We sat beside each other on the crowded bus and shared a room at the Indian border where we stopped for the night. Jeff told me more about what to expect from the ten day retreat we were headed for. He explained that Vipassana, which means to see things as they really are, is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation. It was rediscovered by Gautama Buddha and was taught by him as a general remedy for universal ills. Vipassana is a way of transformation through self-observation. Theoretically, a practitioner's life becomes characterized by increased awareness, non-delusion, self-control and peace. There was that concept again which I found so alluring, 'increased awareness'.

The next morning, after clearing Indian customs and immigration, we crammed onto another crowded and noisy bus headed for Patna. I continued to have trouble with my bowels. When we finally stopped midmorning for a cup of tea at a roadside restaurant, I rushed for the toilet, only to find a line up in front of me. I waited uncomfortably and successfully, or so I thought. When I exited the toilet with a smug feeling of satisfaction I went outside to return to the bus. But the bus was gone, nearly out of sight, far down the road! I began to run, soon stopping with the realization of the futility of the situation.

I walked back to the restaurant, stunned, hoping that Jeff would be able to do something. He had remained on the bus with my bags when I had rushed to the toilet. At least I had my passport and money with me. I didn't relish the idea of replacing all my travel gear, and especially my address book.

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Five minutes later the bus returned. The door opened and the driver angrily waved at me to get on. I rejoined Jeff at our seats half way down the left side of the aisle.

"That was a bit of a drama," he said with typical Canadian understatement. "When we started to move off I ran up to the front of the bus and told the driver that you weren't back yet. He just carried on as if he didn't understand."

"How did you get him to stop?" I asked.

"I put my foot on the brake."

"That would have got his attention." I laughed.

"It did," he said. "But as you saw he wasn't too happy. He's either on a very tight schedule or he figured he had a free backpack."

"Let me just say thank you, Jeff. I'd be in a real bind now if it wasn't for you."

The remainder of the trip was uneventful. We overnighted in Patna, the capital of Bihar, a restful (by Indian standards) metropolis built on the ruins of Pataliputra, which for more than 400 years had been the capital of an enormous empire spanning most of the ancient Indian subcontinent.

From Patna we journeyed to Gaya and then made our way by local transport over dry, red earth countryside to the village of Bodhgaya.

The four most holy places associated with the Buddha are Lumbini (in present day Nepal) where he was born; Bodhgaya, where he attained enlightenment; Sarnath, where he first preached his message, and Kushinagar, where he died. Bodhgaya remains a working Buddhist center and is the most important Buddhist pilgrimage site in the world. True to form, I knew none of this when I arrived in Bodhgaya. Despite its importance in the Buddhist world, Bodhgaya seemed to me little more than a sleepy Indian village, with an overabundance of temples.

Jeff and I headed straight for the Thai Monastery and Temple complex so that we could register for the first of two ten day retreats running sequentially. Men and women (there were nearly one hundred of us, mostly Occidentals) lodged separately, the men sleeping on straw in the low-ceilinged cellar beneath the temple.

Once settled in, Jeff and I visited the Mahabodhi Temple, situated on the site of another temple erected by Ashoka in the 3rd century BC. The fifty meter pyramidal spire stood adjacent to a descendant of the original Bo tree under which Buddha had meditated and obtained enlightenment. The Bo or peepul tree has the apt Latin name, *Ficus religiosa*. It is sacred to Hindus as well as Buddhists and its wood is never used for firewood though the leaves are often cut for fodder. The peepul is planted in favorable locations by roadsides and in villages and towns. None is as auspicious as this particular tree with its wide-spreading canopy and inestimable spiritual significance. There was a great sense of peace and serenity within the temple compound. It was a place of worship for visitors of all religions and walks of life.

Our Vipassana retreat consisted of alternate sitting and walking meditations from early in the morning until after dark. We were requested to conduct ourselves in silence throughout the ten day period. In addition to Christopher Titmus, there was a handful of other experienced meditation teachers from Europe and India. Periodically the students split into smaller groups to engage in discussion with the teachers over the practice of Vipassana meditation, or any difficulties anyone in the group was experiencing.

Each evening Chris Titmus gave a discourse. His ability to expound wisdom and guidance through story and respectful repetition was profound. Rarely, if ever, have I listened to a speaker with such skill in reaching his audience, many of whom had first languages other than English.

Several days into the program my fevers intensified and began to recur on a daily basis. I also developed asthma for the first time in my life. I found this a trifle disconcerting. Hay fever is one thing, searching for a breath is quite another. I'm sure the asthma was at least partly related to our claustrophobic, under-ventilated and dusty (from the straw) sleeping conditions.

These health concerns put constraints on my ability to participate in all the meditations. An Australian course attendee, who was a skilled Chinese Medical Practitioner, performed pulse diagnosis on me and indicated that my life force was very low. He arranged for me to sleep in a private above-ground room in another part of the complex. He encouraged me to rest as much as

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possible, and to refrain from any sexual activity in the coming months in order to build up my energy. I was reading Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, at the time. The Great One had become a celibate brahmacharya and attempted to channel sexual energy into more altruistic activities. The world knows just how effective and influential his efforts have been. Gandhi's story and the words of the Australian Chinese Doctor encouraged me to enter into a period of celibacy.

My intensifying illness led to an important meeting with one of the experienced meditators assisting with the retreat. Berham Ghista, a small, handsome man with short, dark hair had been born into a Parsi (Zoroastrian) family and had later converted to Buddhism. Part of his youth had been spent in Lagos during a period of tremendous turmoil in Nigeria. Berham's family was eventually forced to leave, after numerous armed break-ins of their home. Berham carried remnants of that time in Africa with him. He still suffered from bronchitis and periodic recurrences of malaria, and so he was empathetic to my escalating health concerns. On several occasions he took me to a homeopath in Bodhgaya and he often brought a sympathetic listening ear to my room. At times like these we obviously didn't adhere to vows of silence. In the course of that first ten day retreat and the second retreat that began not long after the completion of the first, Berham and I became friends. That friendship didn't halt my rapidly declining health but his support saw me through the worst fevers.

Berham accompanied me out of Bodhgaya after completion of the second consecutive ten day retreat. I needed his assistance and it was freely proffered as always. Most of my strength had been claimed by the fevers. He put me on a sleeper train to New Delhi in Gaya. I was incredibly grateful for his help.

John P. Haines



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The Water of Life

New Delhi, Late January, 1988.

“**Y**ou look terrible,” said the young man with shorn head and English accent. Though I had never spoken with the man, I recognized him from my recently completed Vipassana retreat in Bodhgaya. He was one of what I called the ‘shorn head brigade’, those who had shaved their heads prior to our evening visit to the massive tree that was a direct descendant of the Boddhi tree where Buddha had attained enlightenment.

“Thanks. Bit of a bad hair day. Those sleeper trains must be a boon for hairdressers. Your hair’s looking good though,” I replied.

He laughed and then said, “But seriously, you look terrible.”

This was beginning to sound repetitive. I wondered if twenty days without talking had had a detrimental effect on the conversational skills of my British visitor. I was seated at a long outdoor table of my favourite Pahar Ganj restaurant in Delhi. My trip from Bodhgaya had been something of a nightmare. I had just dredged up enough strength to board the train and to sleep a few winks between frequent trips to a grotty toilet on board. I had dragged myself from the train in the now familiar New Delhi railway station, checked into a budget hotel, and made it to this sunny seat nearby. Delhi was quite comfortable in winter. I wasn’t sweating now that I had left my backpack behind in my room. I had just ordered a meal when I was joined by this friendly conversationalist.

“At the risk of being rude, do you mind if we start this talk over again,” I less than jovially stated.

"Sure," he replied. "You look terrible."

This wasn't quite what I had in mind. I decided to try another tack. I considered using the rejoinder from my childhood, 'Your mother wears army boots' but there were two strikes against this: one, I hadn't met his mother and two, this sort of humour tended to work only within the geographical area I grew up in. I had noticed during my travels that my Canadian sarcasm suffered blank stares at least as often as it received the laughter the words were meant to elicit. Honesty would have to be my next approach. "I don't look half as terrible as I feel," I said.

"I don't mean to sound nasty, but you look really pale. What's the matter?"

"I wish I knew. Since before the retreat I have been waking many nights with intense fevers. I was wondering if I had malaria. A Western naturopath in Nepal pinpointed trouble with my liver. The Australian Chinese Doctor on the retreat said my life force was very low. That makes sense because I feel exhausted all the time," I explained.

"I have to run for a train now. There's a book I suggest you read. I'll write down the author and title for you," he continued, reaching for a pen. "Do you know where that great bookstore is near Connaught Circus?"

"Yes," I said.

"You'll be able to get the book there," he said. He wrote the details on the back of a napkin and got up to leave. "Good luck to you. Be sure to get that book. You'll be glad you did." He left.

I looked down at the napkin and saw in beautiful handwriting, *The Water of Life* by J.W. Armstrong. I finished my meal. With nothing to lose, I made my way weakly to the bookstore where I purchased the small paperback. I returned to my room, lay on the bed and read the book from cover to cover. John Armstrong had healed himself and many others of maladies that had, until then, resisted all efforts by well-meaning doctors and their allopathic medicines. The method was simple enough, although, to my ears, somewhat unorthodox. The medicine was your own urine and the most effective way to begin the treatment was to have a fast restricted to urine and water.

Social conditioning could be the biggest barrier to drinking urine. What better place to do this than India where virtually

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everything is acceptable. If people are allowed to walk naked in public surely I could drink urine in the privacy of my hotel room. So I began immediately. I purchased a few more books on the subject and retreated to my room. I read about how shipwrecked sailors had survived long periods at sea in lifeboats by drinking their own urine. I read how Mahatma Gandhi had regularly partaken of urine, as had Moraji Desai, former Prime Minister of India, who lived well into his 90s and daily imbibed the 'Water of Life'.

URINE THERAPY, ONE OF NATURE'S FREE WONDER TREATMENTS, has existed since antiquity. Some have chanced upon it, like shipwrecked sailors and fishermen, who would otherwise have perished if they hadn't had the courage to drink their own urine. Others, like some radiantly healthy Buddhist monks in Asia, have passed on the secret for centuries. Urine ingestion is frequently praised as possibly the best rejuvenation therapy known to us. It certainly rejuvenates the hair and the skin. The youthful appearance of those aforementioned Buddhist monks is ascribed to their routine urine ingestion.

It seems that historically all cultures have used urine for medicinal purposes. It is praised in ancient Egyptian papyri, was used in ancient Rome, in China, India, America and Europe. The Journal of the American Medical Association states that in 'primitive medicine' there is scarcely a disease that has not been treated with the external or internal use of urine. A 5,000-year-old Sanskrit text describes in 107 verses the virtues of urine. In one verse Lord Shiva, the great destroyer and regenerator, says that he who drinks urine sweetened with honey is cleared of any ailment within six months, attains brilliant brainpower and his voice becomes melodious.

Then J.W. Armstrong wrote his timeless classic, The Water of Life. He outlined cure after cure, often of the 'incurable', that he had personally guided using the urine fast. He even called the healing of cancer 'child's play' unless the afflicted had already had radiation or chemotherapy. In recent years many other Western authors have added their pens to the growing mountain of data supporting the efficacy of urine as a balm for a multitude of illnesses.

One well known urine ingredient is melatonin, the hormone of the pineal gland. It regulates our body rhythms linked to the dark-light cycle. It is produced in the night and mostly expelled with the morning urine. However it is now highly valued as protecting us from cancer and aging. Melatonin sales in California are said to top aspirin sales. But why pay much money for just one beneficial ingredient when there are thousands for free?

Urine is filled with vital elements. It is not waste. The liver detoxifies the blood and excretes the toxins into the colon. The kidneys balance the blood's vital substances and water level. In short, urine is simply filtered blood. It contains in its fresh condition, only those chemicals and compounds of the blood in circulation in each of us.

Urine therapy need not be taken as a cure for all disease. But it is an option for those that feel drawn to it when their existing treatments are not providing the desired results. And it doesn't cost a cent.

For seven days I dined exclusively on urine and water, took leisurely walks and shared conversations at my favorite café with a small group of travelers who had all converged on Delhi simultaneously. We shared books, stories of our experiences and ideas, and soon became fast, if temporary, friends. Suzy, an Australian, had studied numerology and did charts for us all.

"You have two Master numbers, John," she said to me one pleasant afternoon at the café.

"What does that mean, Suzy?" I asked.

"It means, in essence, that you have come to master yourself, and to share with others in order to assist in their individual journeys of awakening."

"How do I do that?" I asked intrigued.

"Only you will know, but I dare say it would probably be good to continue to share with others some of the stories you have shared with me. A Master's life is often not easy, as tests come your way, but there is the potential for a most rewarding existence.

"Each of us has tendencies that can sabotage our well intentioned efforts. Each of us also has gifts that we can share with others. For a Master these negative tendencies and these

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positive gifts can be quite strong. In mastering your, shall we call it, lower nature, you allow your Higher Self to shine. John, you have the potential to help many.”

Delhi has a pleasant climate in winter. The first few days of my fast, I felt sluggish and I spent significant portions of each day resting and reading in bed. Fortunately I had a sunny second floor room with balcony and attached bath and toilet. It was all quite basic but this represented relative luxury to a backpacker. I enjoyed the trapeze-like antics of monkeys cavorting on the balcony railings. If they were searching for food they had come to the wrong room.

I found Old Delhi a most absorbing place. Sometimes, while sitting at the café, a wedding entourage would pass by complete with nuptial couple in a coach drawn by a stately white horse. Beggars abound, including small children, and some found unique ways to earn money. One had an elephant that entertained us with tricks and then deftly picked up donations with its trunk.

After five days on my exclusively liquid diet I felt better and more energetic than I had in a long time. After seven days I was exhausted and very concerned about my health.

It was time for my scheduled train journey to Pathankot and I embarked, weak, and lightly eating again. I sat on that train in anticipation of receiving help from Yeshi Dhonden, the fabled Tibetan doctor I had read about months before while in the Hunza. I had time to recall some events that had propelled me into earlier dietary changes and my first experiments with fasting.

Tofu in the Tropics

Ontario, February, 1981.

I plan to make a 'last minute' trip with a friend, to escape briefly from the long dark days of the Canadian winter. My friend backs out two days before our scheduled departure. This adds a new twist to the idea of a 'last minute' vacation. The idea with such an arrangement is that you have to take the destination that is available,

and you won't know what this is until the day before leaving. Charter companies are filling last minute cancellations or unregistered seats and hotels. The traveler receives a discount as a reward for waiting.

The travel agent tells me I will be flying to the Barbados, into the unknown to a place I have never been before and know nothing about, and I'll be going alone. I am concerned that I'll be lonely and I won't know what to do. I don't have to go, but I have arranged for the week off work. So I jump—onto a comfortable plane and then to a comfortable hotel on a beautiful island with a comfortable climate. My big leap of faith has landed me in a pretty pleasing situation.

I have a great time. By chance, the first evening in a restaurant, I am asked by a couple who recognize me from the flight to join them at their table for a meal.

"Where are you from?" the man, Bob, asks.

"I live in Oshawa. What about you?" I reply.

"Toronto. Where do you work?"

"Bell Canada. I'm a manager in the Repair Service Bureau."

"Oh! That's a coincidence. I work for Bell Canada as well."

Thus begins a wonderful friendship with this couple, Bob and Jean, in their early fifties.

The next morning I meet them again in the hotel lobby.

Jean says, "We're vegetarians. We're going to buy a few things from the local shop for meals that we prepare ourselves. Would you like to join us?"

"Certainly."

Two years before I had stopped eating red meat and I am on the way to becoming a vegetarian. I still occasionally eat seafood and chicken, and until now, I haven't actually met anyone who is a vegetarian. People making choices like this are not in my circle of family, friends and colleagues.

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As we walk through the shop gathering provisions for the coming days I ask questions about why they are procuring various items. This is a terrific education for me.

The second morning I am out for my daily run when I meet Bob, who is also jogging. We run together.

"Bob. Why have you changed your diet to vegetarian?" I ask.

"Quite simple," he replies, wiping tropical sweat from his brow. "It's the same reason I'm out running; to be healthy and to stay alive. I'm the youngest of five children in my family. I'm 53 now. Every one of my brothers and sisters died of either a heart attack or cancer in their early fifties. I don't want to join them at this time. I love life too much."

"That's understandable," I reply, puffing. I'm working hard to keep up with this man. "But aren't there hereditary predispositions for heart disease or even for cancer? What makes you think you can prevent these things?"

I still recall the shock of everyone on our street when a sixteen-year-old neighboring boy died of leukemia. I just figured it was bad luck. It seemed such an injustice. I had no idea about causes, let alone prevention.

Bob begins to explain. "I've done a lot of reading and I'm convinced that hereditary factors are insignificant compared with the lifestyle choices each of us makes. My brothers and sisters and I were all raised on the same diet and with the same ideals and beliefs as my parents. In growing up, we all continued eating in the same way in which we were raised. Exercise was not part of our lifestyle. I question those early choices now. I choose to educate myself. I know I will live longer than my siblings did. More importantly, I live each day in health and happiness.

"Did you know that cancer of the colon or large intestine is one of the fastest growing cancers today?"

"No."

"Did you also know that by stopping with meat eating, you virtually eliminate the risk of getting colon cancer?"

"Really! Why is that?"

"What would happen if you put a piece of meat outside in this hot climate for a couple of days?"

"It would not be a pretty sight. It would start to stink and it would be covered in flies."

"That's right," Bob continues. "It would begin to rot. It is known that meat sits in our colons for 48 to 72 hours. At 37 degrees Celsius you can imagine what's happening to it!"

"It's rotting!"

"Right. And we wonder why people spend so much money on underarm deodorants?"

"I never thought of that."

"Fruits and vegetables and even grains travel far more quickly than meat through our digestive system. They are much easier for our organs to digest. And properly combined they create less gas."

"That would be worth learning about!" I laugh.

On returning home, I begin to read in earnest. Much of what I discover is, frankly, contradictory. Concerning diet, it seems there are as many opinions as there are people; but I really enjoy books by Paavo Airola such as *Are you Confused?*, in which the author looks at the diet and habits of long-lived people around the world, and outlines an approach to eating and juice fasting based on his extensive research. I realize I need to be discerning and to make one small step at a time. These steps carry me out of the box of school education and the family and environmental factors that have strongly influenced my decisions until now. A couple of years later when I move to Saudi Arabia I have the courage to experiment with juice fasting for the first time.



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The Great Tibetan Doctor

Dharmsala, February, 1988.

I remember very little of the eleven hour train trip from Delhi to Pathankot in Himanchal Pradesh. I had been fortunate to obtain a second class sleeper, and though the train was crowded and stank of stale urine, I managed a good sleep on an upper bunk. It's amazing how useful earplugs and airline eye covers can be. As usual on a train in Asia, my biggest concern was determining which was the correct stop. As a new day dawned, I stepped off the train in Pathankot, the correct station, and it wasn't long before I was sitting on a bus meandering its way to Dharmsala. There I transferred to another bus for the steeper and even more winding trip to the hill station of McLeod Ganj.

After the flat, somewhat monotonous landscape of the Indian plains, it was refreshing to climb onto the conifer-covered ridge-top settlement perched high above the Kangra Valley. As the bus slowed near the Anglican Church of St. John's in the Wilderness, I was reminded that McLeod Ganj was originally built as a hill garrison by the British in the mid 1850s. The church and other rambling colonial structures stood as reminders of the days when British administrators would come here to escape the oppressive summer heat of the plains. Named for the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, David McLeod, and the Hindi word for market, 'ganj', the town served as an important administrative center for the Kangra region until a devastating earthquake in 1905 forced the British to evacuate to the valley.

Before the arrival of the British, Upper Dharmasala, as it was then known, was home only to the semi nomadic Gaddi people. Their calm, friendly presence is still felt in the area.

In 1949, the Chinese People's Army marched into Lhasa. This brutal regime left some 1.2 million Tibetans dead, more than a sixth of the population, and countless monks, nuns, and lay people imprisoned in forced labor camps.

Tibetan Buddhists believe the Dalai Lama to be one of innumerable incarnations of the bodhisattva of compassion, known as 'Chenrezig' in Tibetan. In 1959 Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama and temporal and religious leader of Tibet, feared for his life and the lives of his remaining countrymen and women. He made the difficult decision to lead his people into exile.

Thanks to Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister at the time, he and his fellow Tibetans were allowed to settle in this rugged hill station alongside the indigenous Gaddi.

Little did I know that my arrival in McLeod Ganj would coincide with Losar, Tibetan New Year. Tibetans believe that both negative and positive actions performed during Losar reverberate through the year to come. This was the time when the Dalai Lama gave frequent discourses, and people arrived from far and wide to see this great man of peace and to hear his translated talks. The village was very busy, like a tourist resort in season, and rooms and beds were at a premium. A spare bed was generously offered to me by another traveler already staying in The Green Hotel, a well known cinder-block tourist lodge. As more and more people poured into town my roommate and I offered space on the floor to another backpacker.

The weather was abysmal—cold and gray and wet with a little uncomfortable wind thrown in, not unlike the end of winter in southern Ontario, although a little warmer. Rumor had it that the Dalai Lama asked his weather-controlling lamas to bring on rain so that only people who genuinely wanted to listen to him would brave the elements in order to do so.

I was here to consult with Dr. Yeshe Dhonden and I hoped that the positive action I took in seeing him now would reverberate

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through my year to come. I recalled some of what I had read while in the Hunza about this impressive man:

***D**R. YESHI DHONDEN WAS BORN IN 1929 INTO A PROSPEROUS farming family living in a small village one day's ride from Lhasa. He was an only child and it was his parents' wish that he devote his life to the Dharma. Consequently, at the age of six, he left home to be accepted as a novice monk in a nearby monastery.*

Even at such an early age, Yeshi distinguished himself with prodigious feats of memorization. On this basis he was selected at the age of eleven to represent his monastery at Mendzekhang, the larger of Lhasa's two state-run medical colleges.

Here, from four until seven each morning, by the soft light of butter lamps, Yeshi joined classmates memorizing the 1,140 pages of the four medical tantras, the root texts, preached by the Buddha. These texts, together with hundreds of commentaries and pharmacological catalogues, were the basis of Tibetan Medicine.

After being tested by teachers and having their first bowls of tea the whole college joined in prayer. Although much of Yeshi Dhonden's day was dedicated to memorization, he often looked in on the pharmacologists as they pounded into fine powders the various plant parts, gems, minerals and animal products used in the multitude of natural medicines routinely prepared at the college.

The student body once again assembled following an early dinner at five o'clock. It was time for debate and anyone who has witnessed Tibetan monks engaged in debate can attest to the vociferous and enthusiastic shouts and claps that comprise this exercise. These sessions went on to ten o'clock, or even far into the night when participants got caught up in the heat of the debate.

After two years and four months, Yeshi Dhonden completed memorizing the medical tantras and, despite his youth, he passed his examinations in good standing. He was now admitted into the college for four years of formal education. These comprehensive studies began with mastering the Root Tantra, which explains how the three humours, wind, bile and phlegm, govern the health of all sentient beings. Every illness, and the tantras categorize 84,000 of them, owes its cure to the correction of humoral imbalance.

With a grounding in the understanding of the humours, Yeshi Dhonden went on to study anatomy, pathology, treatment, diagnosis and other practical aspects of Tibetan Medicine. Anatomical knowledge was obtained from detailed charts first drawn up late in the eighth century when Tibetan surgeons routinely performed heart and brain surgery. After the mother of King Muni Tsenpo died during a heart operation, surgery was officially banned.

The hallmark of a leading physician is diagnosis. Apart from questioning the patient, examination of urine and the eyes, the foundation of diagnosis, and the true magic of Tibetan medicine, is found in pulse diagnosis, usually checked on the wrists. Unlike the other academic studies this involved an intensive year of practice under the direction of trained physicians.

It is said to take at least ten years of practice to begin to master pulse diagnosis. Yeshi Dhonden's true education in this area came only after his studies were completed and he was sent at the age of eighteen to spend four years as an intern with a master physician practising in Lhoka. Now Dr. Dhonden rose before dawn each day to take pulses, inspect urine samples and present his diagnosis of patients' ailments to his teacher.

Although some patients in advanced states of illness could not be cured, others afflicted with usually fatal degenerative diseases such as cancer and diabetes responded with complete remission. When herbal medicines proved ineffective Yeshi and his teacher used accessory treatments including emetics, purgatives, moxibustion (application of heat), cauterization, and acupuncture. Interestingly, Tibetan medical history claims that acupuncture originated in Tibet and later spread to China via Mongolia.

As part of his training, Dr. Yeshi Dhonden was required to accompany the college on annual herb gathering outings in the mountains.

Ultimately, Yeshi graduated at the top of his class, although he claims that two of his classmates intentionally made mistakes to give him the top spot.

Three additional years as the special assistant of Kenrab Norbu, principal at Mendzekhang, followed. He continued to treat patients, to debate and to intentionally develop compassionate qualities. When these three years were completed, he looked

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forward to taking up practice on his own, thirteen long years after his education began.

He needn't wait long. An epidemic had broken out along the Bhutanese border and three physicians had been attempting, unsuccessfully, to stem the spread of disease. Many were dying. Dr. Dhonden joined the doctors late one evening, and after his regular nightly meditation, he went to sleep. He expected to see his first patients in the morning. That night he was visited in a dream by a khadroma, a spiritual being like an angel that is believed to aid practitioners in meditation. This woman approached him with a cup of urine and asked for his diagnosis. He was asked how he would stop this disease. After much questioning and debate this being suddenly disappeared and Yeshe Dhonden woke up.

Upon seeing his first patient the next day, he recognized the cup of urine from his dream and then recalled the remainder of the night's dialogue and treatment. He prepared the correct medicines, the man recovered and the epidemic was stopped.

His reputation spread and he found himself traveling during the rest of the 1950s from one district to another, successfully treating illness in the time honored Tibetan way that gives treatment for free and only charges for medicines.

Finally, in 1959, after an uprising in Lhasa against the nine year Chinese occupation, the Dalai Lama fled the country. Dr. Yeshe Dhonden soon followed, and after hiding for a month from Chinese troops, he made a treacherous crossing into the forests of Bhutan. After walking across Bhutan, begging day to day for his food, Dr. Dhonden found himself in Dalhousie, where 3,000 refugees were camped in squalid conditions. Tuberculosis, hepatitis, dysentery and other filth-induced illnesses were rife. Dr. Dhonden prepared what medicines he could from the limited herbs available in local Indian stores. Once again he was successful, despite harassment and disbelief from Indian doctors.

Unexpectedly, in mid-1960, he was personally summoned by the Dalai Lama to come to Dharmasala. People were living in poor conditions, many in tents. He began immediately to treat patients. After successfully treating the Dalai Lama for a skin disorder and the Rinpoche at the head of the Gelugpa sect for swelling around

the heart, he was appointed to be the Dalai Lama's personal physician.

He then undertook the massive job of preserving Tibetan medicine in exile. Only two other traditional Tibetan doctors had escaped from Tibet, and they were unable to assist Dr. Dhonden in Dharmasala. He began to train ten students in the rudiments of Tibetan Medicine. This school, founded through his strength of will and enthusiasm, is still going strong and Tibetan medicine is now very much alive and growing.

Dr. Dhonden passed this responsibility on to others once the school was firmly established, and he opened his private practice in McLeod Ganj. In 1978 he relinquished his role as personal physician to the Dalai Lama. From that time on he was free to travel, treat patients, write books such as Health Through Balance and introduce Tibetan medicine to the West.

It turns out that the roots of Tibetan Medicine go further back into antiquity than one can imagine. Long, long before Buddhism entered Tibet another philosophy was in place called Bön, a Tibetan term meaning to 'invoke a deity'. Tonpa Shenrab Miwo, who was born 17,000 years before the historical Buddha, founded the Bön tradition. Yes, you read that correctly, that is nearly 20,000 years ago.

Both Tonpa Shenrab Miwo and Buddha are regarded as master physicians because they diagnosed the root causes of suffering. They developed similar ideas about how to transform suffering, encourage happiness and create inner balance. Perhaps Buddhism was embraced wholeheartedly in Tibet because its teachings matched the existing Bön teachings so closely.

It was with some apprehension and a great deal of hope that I sat in the waiting room of the renowned healer, Dr. Yeshe Dhonden. I had been advised to bring a pre-breakfast urine sample, and this I held discreetly in a paper bag. My embarrassment was somewhat alleviated when I noticed that most of the other people in that room held jars with yellowish liquid or bulging, sloshing paper bags.

I walked the great man, a slightly plump little lama in burgundy robes. 'Walked' may not be the appropriate description. He

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half limped and half shuffled in, reminiscent of an aging absent-minded professor. All heads in the room bowed in respect. Dr. Dhonden's palms came together over his heart in that lovely Asian gesture of respect. He stopped, as if to check that the incense burning in the rectangular container of sand was still lit, and then opened the door and shuffled into his inner sanctum. There was something childlike, innocent and humble about this man that bolstered my hope. I knew I had come to the right man.

In the first weeks of visits to Yeshi Dhonden my symptoms moved and intensified, like the mood of a snake caught in a bag. The fevers now came every night and the chills every morning. At least these symptoms had reached a crescendo of predictability. One day my head felt as if it was expanding, like a balloon being inflated. I queried my roommate if he could see any outward evidence of this. "You look just the same to me," he responded. Obviously this wasn't an entirely physical sensation. This ethereal expansion was followed by a clearing that was accompanied by what can only be described as an inaudible 'whoosh' and the feeling that every previous thought in my brain was cleansed, if not erased.

John P. Haines



22

The Awakening

*To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wildflower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.*

William Blake 1757 – 1827

I had complete faith in the intuitive skills of Yeshe Dhonden. I only wished that my questions would be answered. Each time I asked, “What is wrong with me?” Khalsang, his translator and apprentice, would consult with Dr. Dhonden in Tibetan and then turn to me and say simply, “Spleen.”

When I asked, “What caused it?” there would be no response.

Next I would question, “Could it have been the medical drugs used to treat the spinal meningitis I had in Norway?”

More discussion would be followed with an equally unsatisfying single word response, “Yes.”

My symptoms intensified in the first weeks of seeing this great healer. The fevers now came every night for a longer duration. The chills came each morning after breakfast and they lasted a full hour each time. Afterwards, I remained in bed to allow the aching, overused muscles in my tummy, arms and shoulders to relax. When I expressed my fears to Yeshe Dhonden and Khalsang they appeared singularly unconcerned and said very little.

My eyes became increasingly sensitive to sunlight. An American couple, both of whom were qualified naturopaths, came to visit me often.

"Your eyes are connected to your liver and your liver must have become stressed through dealing with toxins in your body."

"Is this why my eyes are getting worse?"

"Absolutely. Looking at your eyes and your yellowing skin, you have the classic symptoms of hepatitis."

"That doesn't sound good. Somewhere I heard that the liver cannot regenerate."

"That is simply not true. I would guess that the herbal medicine Yeshi Dhonden is prescribing is putting you into a healing crisis."

I didn't like the sound of this. "What does that mean?" I asked.

"Simply that a natural course of healing will cause old symptoms to reappear sequentially—old symptoms which have been previously suppressed by medicine. There are no Western allopathic drugs being used now to mask symptoms. You just have to go through things this time, as painful and as frightening to you as they may be. It is not unusual to feel worse before you get better."

This could explain why I had felt great after five days of my urine fast and terrible two days later. These words also supported what had been told me by an American woman who was helping with paper work in Dr. Dhonden's clinic. She had come to him months before dying from cancer, and she was now completely healed.

"It got worse for me before it started to get better," she'd said. "I'm sure that is the case for you as well. You'll be OK. You just have to be patient."

In the meantime the symptoms worsened. One morning I woke up to find I was unable to see in the sunlight. My eyes ached and my visual field was one painful white screen, like an impenetrable blizzard of snow. Two friends took my arms and escorted me to Yeshi Dhonden's clinic. He simply took my pulse, looked at my urine, peered into my eyes, and adjusted the herbal prescription. He seemed to be as unconcerned as always. I got the impression that he knew things about my future that I didn't know. Every time I saw this man my confidence in the natural process of healing was bolstered.

The American couple returned.

"Now you are having a real healing crisis," she said after I described my visual symptoms. "It usually gets better after that."

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"I certainly hope so." I was lying in my bed recovering from the latest shaking bout of chills. "Why do I always have the fevers and chills at the same time?" I asked.

"Dr. Dhonden said your spleen is stressed. According to traditional Chinese medical theory, the peak time of day for the spleen is nine to eleven in the morning. That is when you have your chills, isn't it?" she continued.

"Yes."

"The peak liver time is one to three in the morning, which is when you are having your fevers. These two organs are undergoing a severe cleanse. In due course, you will be thankful for this."

"I hope so."

"I don't think this is the right time for you, what with the treatment you are receiving now, but there are several easy ways to naturally cleanse your liver. Some people do these annually. One way involves drinking lots of apple juice over a period of several days. Another method uses Epsom salts, olive oil, and grapefruit or lemon juice. What I think would benefit you now is to eat lots of raw garlic," said her husband.

"Are you suggesting I drive away the few people who come to see me now with garlic breath?"

He laughed. "Of course not. But a natural course of healing almost always involves cleaning the colon or large intestine of parasites. It is difficult to be in Asia and not pick up some parasites."

I took their advice and began eating sliced garlic on toasted whole grain bread for lunch. My friends still came to visit. The Ayurveda toothpaste may have helped.

The weeks rolled by. The fevers and chills persisted. Travelers came and went. The naturopath couple moved on. A Polish man befriended me and told me about black radish, which is a traditional liver food where he comes from.

I spent a lot of time in bed. One day I broke the tedium by going to see the movie, *Ocean of Wisdom*, at the little Tibetan cinema in town. This documentary reviewed the life of the Dalai Lama. I was impressed with his ordinariness and the joy he received from his hobby of playing with electronic devices. Though I had not attended the Dalai Lama's public discourses, it

was his life that most interested me. His words would fill pages. His life spoke volumes.

During this time His Holiness had made an overseas trip and a story from this trip was circulating around McLeod Ganj. The Dalai Lama had attended a banquet at Cambridge University. Meat, ham I believe, was served at the banquet. After the meal the Dalai Lama addressed the assembled body of young scholars. The floor was then opened for questions and one self assured student asked His Holiness, "Sir, my understanding is that Buddhists support the idea of non-violence and discourage the taking of life. Why then would you eat the ham that was served this evening?"

A murmur of anticipation pulsed through the audience. How would the Dalai Lama respond to this challenge? The Dalai Lama gave one of his characteristic laughs and said, "That is a good question and I have a simple answer. I supposed the ham was served to me with love. Therefore I accepted it with love."

In a world in which the words of our leaders so often outstrip their actions, it was refreshing to see the words, loving intention and actions merge as one in this powerful public figure.

Generally I only left my room for short walks to the market and to the Tibetan Library or to the Tushita Retreat Center to get more reading material. My studies continued unabated. I read Mary Lutyens' biographical volumes on Jiddu Krishnamurti. I was particularly impressed with an awakening period he went through in his late twenties while staying in Ojai, California with his brother and assisted by a friend. He went through intense pain that seemed to occur at the same times each day. I could certainly relate to that. He gave me hope because his experience led to a significant spiritual opening for him. Krishnamurti had been expensively educated in England and France as part of the Theosophical Society's preparation for him to become the new spiritual World Teacher. In 1929 in the Netherlands Krishnamurti made a famous speech where he repudiated his forthcoming role as the World Teacher. Why? Because he claimed that Truth was not something that could be found through any teacher, tradition or religion. Every individual had to find it for himself.

Ironically, though he had refused messiah-hood, Krishnamurti went on to become a world-renowned teacher, giving talks

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occasioned by profound insights into the deepest questions of humanity. A sage-like figure, Krishnamurti died in 1986 in Ojai, California, at the age of 91.

I used to breakfast early in order to be back safely in my bed on time for the predictable chills. Then the experience modified slightly. For several consecutive mornings the cold shakes were joined by a rhythmic beating in my right ear. I noted that this beating had a rhythm different to my heart beat. I sensed that something unusual was coming, but I was ill prepared for the extent of the extraordinary events that were to unfold.

On about the third morning in which the chills were accompanied by the thumping in my right ear, the chills and shaking suddenly stopped after only about twenty minutes. I lay on my back in a deep relaxation, absolutely devoid of any tension. I had never felt this relaxed before. There was a deep peace. I was entirely immersed in the present. No memories of the past or thoughts of the future intruded on this sense of peace I was feeling.

The next thing I knew I was out in the stars resting in the black, cavernous emptiness of the universe. I had read about out of body experiences. But they involved going somewhere. I was still present in my body, on my bed and in my room.

I inquired with my mind as to what was going on. A part of me, an infinitesimally small part, smaller than the smallest dot, occupying 'zero' space, was resting in space. Simultaneously there was this personality, John, lying motionless on the bed. I looked through John's eyes and could see his hands and arms, the sleeping bag and the ceiling.

This other part, I'll call it 'I', knew that It could go anywhere in creation instantly, and knew that It had created everything including the John lying on the bed. I rested in absolute silence and peace. I didn't go anywhere. I didn't need to. It was all my creation and I had made it for fun, for my pleasure. But it felt so peaceful to rest in the nothingness, in the stillness, that I went nowhere. There was nowhere to go. Simultaneously I looked through the eyes of this personality, John. I, the nameless Presence, rested.

Once when John attempted to move an arm he couldn't. An infinitely powerful and loving presence said, "No. Rest longer." And John did.

I, this infinitesimally small point of nothingness, knew everything, created everything, loved everything. There was nowhere to go. Why would 'I' go anywhere when I rested in an infinite pool of love and power? 'I Am present. I was here before all the worlds were created. I will still be here when they are gone. I.'

What bliss! After resting thus for what could have been hours, or for the blinking of an eye, since time (and space) meant nothing in this Godly state of being, I again attempted to move an arm. A residue of that immense love and power initially resisted. Then the experience was over as suddenly as it had begun, and I was again John, lying on my back in a sleeping bag in my room in the Green Hotel in McLeod Ganj in India on Planet Earth. For days I couldn't wipe the smile off my face or the sensation of bliss that came with every breath. The experience had been so intensely personal and impersonal, and so unspeakably profound that it would be at least a year before I shared it with anyone. I felt that it might somehow be diminished in the sharing.

From that memorable day onwards I never had another fever or chill, and my recovery was steady if not spectacular. Nothing seemed to be a problem. Nothing that John experienced in day to day life could be that important compared with the immensity of what could be called 'The Is'.

I began taking walks again. Initially fifteen minutes was as long as I could last before needing to sit down and garner my strength. The duration of the walks was extended as my vigor returned. I was a bag of bones, looking like a starving Buddha. But I was happy, happier than I had ever been. And I was grateful to have been given an experience of the Divine. Life, and my perception of it, would never be the same again. There is an indwelling Presence that animates everyone and everything, and through this Presence we are all One. I saw now that my job was to begin, step by step, to live this Truth. I knew that my future journey would lead me back to the profound state of Beingness I had experienced. And I knew that my future only came one day at

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a time. All I had to do was my best. All anyone has to do is their best.

The words of the Masters suddenly made perfect sense. The world is inside me. To heal the world I need only heal myself, discover myself, uncover my Self, the creator of all that exists.

John P. Haines



23

Did Jesus Live in India?

Some of my studies took me down a path I had not anticipated in the least. After reading *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, Holger Kersten's book *Jesus Lived in India* and Janet Bock's *The Jesus Mystery* I felt obliged to expand my vision of just how remarkable this man, known today as Jesus, actually was. According to Kersten and Bock, Jesus, under the name of Issa, as he is still known today in the Middle East, traveled with Thomas to various centers of learning such as the great library of Alexandria, and Ephesus and Persia during the 'missing 18 years'—and then ultimately to India, as a seeker of available sciences and wisdom. In India, Thomas went to the south-west and studied. Jesus traveled north of the Indus and studied under Hindu and Buddhist masters. There was and is considerable evidence to show that Jesus might not have been just hanging out in the desert for the eighteen years unaccounted for in the Bible.

Like Alexander centuries before, Jesus may have ventured east. Unlike Alexander, he wouldn't have gone with conquest on his mind, he would have gone to learn.

Learning How to Die

Some of the great pleasures of a life of travel are the wonderful, completely unexpected encounters with other adventurers. Living in McLeod Ganj was like being at an informal university with study, discussion, walking and contemplation. People came from all over the world just to be there. These visitors had a range of

motives for making such a trip. Some were Buddhists who came to attend the teachings of the Dalai Lama or one of the other great Tibetan teachers who lived or visited there. Others, like me, were seeking help with health issues. Yeshe Dhonden and other Tibetan doctors were highly sought in this regard. A few, like seventy-six-year-old Wynne Pritchard, came to this Tibetan enclave in order to learn how to die.

I was sitting alone for breakfast in the restaurant of the Green Hotel. It was one of those cool sunny spring mornings that signaled the end of winter and made me almost instantly forget the last few weeks of dull, cold and wet weather in this Himalayan hill station. A bus must have just arrived because I saw several backpackers walking up the road from the direction of town. One of these new arrivals entered the restaurant, heaved off his backpack and came over to me.

“Mind if I sit with you?” asked this man in an accent that I guessed to be Scottish. “I’ve come on an overnight train to Pathankot and I reckon a spot of breakfast would go down fine about now.”

“Good morning.” I smiled. “It would be a pleasure to share this table with you.”

“That is kind of you.” This tall, broad shouldered, sturdily built man spoke in an intelligent, cultivated way that seemed at odds with his muscular, square working-man’s hands. He had all of his hair and some of it was still brown. His face showed the healthy lines of a long life spent outdoors. He was definitely not built in the mould of the prototypical backpacker. I was curious to hear his story.

“My name is John. May I recommend the tsampa porridge? That is the traditional Tibetan barley flour porridge. It is sustaining and here in this little restaurant the cooks manage to keep the lumps out; that is not the case in every restaurant in town. I definitely wouldn’t recommend lumpy tsampa. It is not very palatable.” I grinned.

“Thanks John. My name is Wynne. I will try some of this tsampa as you call it,” he said. “And I won’t hold it against you if I don’t like it.”

I laughed, “That’s good Wynne. Hey, I’ve been in McLeod Ganj, in fact in this hotel, for about a month and a half so I know

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my way around pretty well. If there is anything in particular you are looking for I would be happy to help.”

“Thanks John. I already have some contacts that I acquired from a Buddhist friend at home. I am happy to tell you why I am here. I have come to pick the brains of some of these lamas about dying. I brought along a copy of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Have you heard of it?”

“Yes. I have heard of it, but I can’t say that I’ve read it. Why come here to learn about dying, Wynne? You look pretty healthy.”

“Oh, I’m healthy all right. But at seventy six it doesn’t hurt to be prepared. My wife died a couple of years ago and that, I suppose, has brought my ignorance about death and dying to the fore.”

Wynne joined me for breakfast most mornings over a period of one-and-a-half weeks. It was a great pleasure to enjoy my morning repast without the need to rush off for my daily chills right after. Wynne regaled me with stories of his encounters with various Tibetan lamas and I shared with him the results of my broad ranging studies.

“Wynne, your pilgrimage to the Himalayas to learn how to die parallels a journey by another man who may have come to India to learn how to live,” I began one such morning.

“Who would that have been, John?”

“Jesus of Nazareth. According to a Tibetan manuscript in a Ladakh monastery originally discovered by Russian scholar and explorer Nicolai Notovich in the late 1800s, Jesus first studied with the Jains when he came to India on foot. Jesus grew up watching animals being sacrificed as part of the rituals of Judaic religious observances. The Jains abhor such actions, believing all life is sacred.”

“Don’t they sometimes wear cloths over their mouths to avoid inadvertently swallowing insects?”

“Yes. This document states that Jesus learned about non violence and vegetarianism from them. Again, based on what I’ve been reading, he also studied with Hindu and Buddhist masters. While still in India, he stood up to the priest caste and challenged their assertions of superiority over the parts of society

considered beneath concern, much as Mahatma Gandhi did nearly two millennia later, when he stood up for the ‘untouchables’. Look at these words of Jesus from the manuscript, Wynne. ‘God has made no difference between his children, who are all alike dear to him.’ The document says that Jesus was almost killed for this, just escaping at night when forewarned of the murder attempt.”

“This is compelling stuff, John. It makes you think.”

Interconnectedness

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us ‘Universe’, a part limited in time and space. He experiences his thoughts and feelings as something apart from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Albert Einstein 1879 – 1955

The walk to the Tibetan Library was one I always enjoyed, and not just because it was all downhill. The sealed road wound round past the Dalai Lama’s residence and the adjacent Tsuglagkhang Temple. Aside from a halfway teahouse (where I had once taken refuge during a rainstorm) and the strip of pavement itself, there was little to indicate man’s presence and ingenuity. There was also very little traffic so walks were usually accompanied only by birdsong and the rustling of the wind through the surrounding vegetation.

The previous day had been a wet one and now, with the early morning sun shining, the landscape oozed with cleanliness, its purity palpable after yesterday’s wash. There is something life affirming when the sun shines after a rain, akin to the exquisitely alive feeling one has after a period of sickness and convalescence. It is as if the dirt and sorrows of a thousand

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yesterdays have been washed away and the golden dawning of a new day promises renewed hopes for tomorrow.

The sun was not yet hot so the moisture draping the stems and leaves of the forest reflected back the light of hope. Nature shone resplendent in a cloak of a thousand rays, nay, a million glistening jewels. Each sunlit drop of water was a twinkling individual world, an opalescent sphere of transparent shimmering beauty and I, vicariously cleansed, was one with each of these worlds, bonded by a love that made no distinctions.

Every leaf that fell to the forest floor, every pebble on the path, each was unique and each was an integral part of the whole, an infinitely intricate multidimensional puzzle of unimaginable complexity, precision and perfection.

I floated, more than walked, down that hillside. I felt incredibly light and buoyant. I looked down to confirm that my feet were, in fact, contacting the road.

In that timeless, exultant moment I knew that I was interconnected with all of existence. The interstitial, invisible web was suddenly revealed; I *knew* it to be real and I too was caught inextricably in this web and I was grateful for it.

Upon arriving at the library I made my way to one of the two long wooden tables in the largest reading room. As yet, there was no one else there, being so early. I pulled out paper and pen and began to write, surrounded by my friends, the books on the shelves. I drafted a letter to my parents. I was totally focused, intent on capturing in prose this concept of interconnectedness that was now experientially proven to be real. Only when the letter was complete did I pause to look up. There, seated about the room, were three people who must have quietly arrived while I was so busily engaged in the act of writing. To my astonishment I realized that I knew each of these people; having met one in the Hunza, another in Kathmandu, and the third in Delhi. Each had decided to visit the library at the precise time that I wrote about interconnectedness. The web was real; and here before me, midst the laughter of the gods, was once again proof of its existence.

Only years later, was I to discover that this doctrine of interconnectedness comes with a formidable responsibility. Not only was it a potent force to manifest good, but misused this

far-reaching ability can destroy. Thought travels beyond the speed of light. In fact, thought doesn't play by the rules of time at all. Thought can be a terrible burden and misused it was to shatter all that I valued, all I had worked for including the relationship with the one I loved. But that is not the subject of this book.

I was to find, well and truly, that if I was to heal the world I would need to heal myself. I was to find that it was unnecessary to dredge up and purge every last destructive thought. The garbage pit of the mind is bottomless. Rather than to attempt to destroy this endless pile of junk I found it was far more helpful to build upon that which was good, that which was creative, that which was loving. I found it productive to develop my life so that it was filled, but not overfilled, with activity and space that resonated with my deeper purpose of existence. When I built and worked on the ideals and the relationships I loved, there was little room for the ugly and petty reaches of the mind to be assertive. There is more effective power in working for the good than in opposing the evil.

Besides, life happens, and since we are all interconnected, all that each of us does impacts on the whole. It can be naïve and immature to think that all that happens in my life is my creation. Rather than attempting to fix it all, I was to find that true happiness comes in accepting life just as it is presented, and rejoicing in the awareness that all, well and truly, is well.

In developing and building on the good, the destructive side, unattended, will naturally wither and atrophy. Quite literally this part of my being has sown the seeds of its own destruction. Only the hard way was I to discover that it was better to pay no heed to the unattractive parts of my subconscious. Every time I gave them attention and tried to eradicate them they would return, often stronger than ever, like the weeds that get sprayed on the side of the road. It is only a matter of time before they reseed themselves and return.

Only a purified mind is untouched by the ravages of the world.

I was also to discover, nearly too late, that I can't escape from this world. It followed me to the remotest hinterlands I could find. Fear attracted to me that which I feared. I was to personally discover that there is nothing to fear but fear itself. Nothing in the outer world needed to change, only my perception of it. Nothing

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in this world, nothing I said or did, nothing anyone else said or did could hurt me, provided I accepted everything unconditionally and totally. Then, and only then, could I rest in a deep, imperturbable peace.

A Yogi and a Wolf

Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, originally published in 1946, remains a spiritual classic to this day. The book, containing beautifully written stories of Yogananda's childhood, his yogic training with his Master, the venerable Sri Yukteswar, his encounters with Saints and Masters in the East and West, and his founding of the Self Realization Fellowship in America, has inspired countless spiritual aspirants around the world. I have read the book many times and I still consider Yogananda to be a true guiding light of the devotional path. He is a harbinger of faith, resilience, Godliness and persistence. In times of doubt to pick up his book and read of the life of Lahiri Mahasaya, or Yogananda's meetings with Therese Neuman or Babaji, the Immortal Saint of the Himalayas, serves to reignite the flame of Inner Longing, to renew the quest for mergence with the Inner Divine Fire.

One warm and radiant day I decided to hike up to a small Tibetan monastery located near the Tushita Meditation Center. Here, on the edge of an expansive lawn, bordered by forested hillside, I spread out my cotton Balinese blanket, and stretched out to read *Autobiography of a Yogi* for the first time. With only a gentle breeze as my companion and warmed by the early spring sun, I was soon solitarily absorbed in this thoroughly engrossing book. After some time I was nudged from my literary reverie by the distinct feeling that I was being watched. I looked up to see an animal in luxuriant blended gradients of beige and brown fur standing three to four meters away on the grass, just inside the forest fringe. It was a wolf. Our eyes met, and in that instant I read no ill intention, absolutely no malice. Only a benevolent wonder and mild surprise registered in those gentle lupine eyes. After a moment, perhaps with curiosity sated, this beautiful creature

turned and fearlessly walked back into the forest, as noiselessly as it had arrived.

I felt a deep thrill to have been visited by this oft maligned mammal. In a fleeting moment, as our eyes had connected, I was one with Wolf, the Teacher in Native American tradition. I wondered if it was mere coincidence that this strong and wise animal had arrived just as I lay reading the autobiography of a great teacher, Paramahansa Yogananda, who left this earthly plane in 1952.



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Milarepa

MILAREPA (PRONOUNCED MI-LA-RAS-PA) WAS BORN IN 1052 IN Tibet into a prosperous family of traders. His father died when Milarepa was only seven. Just before his death his father, Mila Banner of Wisdom, put his considerable wealth and property into the hands of a trustee until the time when Milarepa would be old enough to inherit that responsibility. Contrary to his father's wishes, some of Milarepa's rapacious relatives seized everything and turned his mother and the children into servants. Their clothes were rags, they were ill fed and they were worked without rest. His mother felt shame and despair and longed to avenge the cruel uncle and aunt who had seized the inheritance and virtually enslaved them.

When Milarepa came of age his mother convinced him to learn sorcery in order to pay back these people for what they had done. Out of love for his mother, he studied black magic with a lama and, when ready, used his new skills to wreck vengeance on his relations. From a distance he caused a building to collapse, killing thirty five family members, everyone except the aunt and uncle who had been most responsible for the cruelty to Milarepa's mother and her children.

The hate in his mother's heart had not yet been extinguished. She now urged Milarepa to study further so that he could send hailstorms to even more extended family and destroy their forthcoming harvest of grain. This he did.

But Milarepa could not reconcile himself to the evil he had done. He repudiated his deeds and decided to devote the rest of his life to a spiritual path. He studied Buddhism but no teacher

could free him from his guilt until he encountered Marpa, a married Buddhist lay teacher. Marpa was a translator recently returned from India, where he had been studying under another teacher named Naropa. From this great man he had obtained the secret of attaining Enlightenment in one life and in one body. Milarepa placed himself under the authority of this master teacher or lama.

Marpa subjected Milarepa to a harsh regime of physical labor and mental discipline. He ordered Milarepa to build a tower on the eastern crest of a mountain without any help, digging and hauling rocks to make walls, floors and roof, finishing the tower fit for occupancy. Then he was ordered to tear it down and build another tower on the western crest of the same mountain. This went on successively for many years, without explanation from the outwardly harsh and gruff Marpa. Milarepa labored without respite, in the cold and to a state of exhaustion. He was forced to meditate long hours without rest and was often put to new efforts at Marpa's apparently cruel or capricious whim, driving Milarepa to the brink of collapse and despair.

Milarepa developed horrible sores on his back and at more than one time considered suicide. But, in the end he persisted, knowing that his past deeds were enormous in their treachery, and feeling in his heart that he deserved nothing but punishment. Gradually, the effect of his past on his mind waned and Marpa judged Milarepa worthy of the final steps in breaking from that past and realizing the end of the ego that sustained it.

Marpa assigned Milarepa to live in solitude on a mountainside in meditation. Milarepa obeyed and was progressing for nearly a year. But one night he dreamt that he had returned home to discover his mother dead and his sister a beggar, and the property for which he had pursued murder now neglected and overrun. The dream deeply disturbed him. Stricken with grief and longing to see his mother, he left his meditation and Marpa and went back to his home village, where all the premonitions of his dream were confirmed. Witnessing this painful human existence helplessly and futilely consumed in fleeting evanescence, an anguish of desire to renounce the world wrung his heart. He made a solemn vow that he would meditate on a remote mountain uninterruptedly until he reached the Ultimate Enlightenment.

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Milarepa found a mountain cave and dwelt there alone in meditation for twelve years. Legend claims that he remained in that cave year round, naked and subsisting on nettles, his body turning green from the nettles or from algae growing on his skin. But finally Milarepa attained liberation.

Milarepa's feat did not go unnoticed in the region, so that though he was consequently always a hermit, his fame was already widespread. Milarepa's chief place of meditation was Snow Mountain in the so-called Red Rock Jewel Valley. Here he remained in summer. In autumn he traveled from village to village, a penniless wanderer or mendicant seeking alms. In winter he dwelt in forests, meditating. In spring he emerged again, wandering over meadows, hills, and brooks.

During the months of public wandering, Milarepa taught freely, but even in seclusion others came to listen to him. He taught enlightenment and the path to Buddhahood through his spontaneously composed songs. Wherever he went, crowds of people gathered to hear his sweet sounding voice singing the Dharma. He wrote nothing, his famous The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa were recorded by others and passed on by oral tradition. They remain today as the biography of a saint, a guide book for devotions, a manual of Buddhist yoga, a volume of songs and poems, and even a collection of Tibetan folklore from the time when the pre-Buddhist Bon traditions were still strong and pervasive.

In today's terms Milarepa had been a mass murderer. He was subsequently a fully Enlightened Master. He died in 1135, but his story remains a shining example that there is hope for us all and that 'all things are possible'.

Cucumber and Sprouts

Dharmasala, April, 1988.

I saw her for the first time the previous evening. She was having a meal in the company of a tall, red haired man in a restaurant in the heart of McLeod Ganj. The place was busy. It was later than my

usual time to eat and I had never frequented this particular venue before. But I'd been asked out to the meal by an American woman who was my next door neighbor at the Green Hotel.

This morning I had seen her again doing yoga on the rooftop of the hotel. She had long, straight blond hair and she was lovely with features that were perhaps European. She had a lithe, fit body. I had paused to watch for a few moments as she glided effortlessly through her yoga routine. This was India. It was not unusual to see someone doing yoga, but there was an inexpressible something about this young woman that captured my attention.

And now, as I entered the Green Hotel Restaurant for lunch, I saw her seated at one of the two most desirable tables at the far end of the room. These tables had windows overlooking the path that went round the end of the hotel, the very path I had just walked up from my room.

She sat alone. In fact, there was no one else in the restaurant.

I walked into the kitchen to say hello to my three Nepalese friends who ran the restaurant. How often had they helped me? How many times had they prepared steamed dishes for me using bitter gourd, called karaila, that was reputed to be excellent for the liver, and other vegetables I personally purchased from local vendors? They had seen me in my worst days, and their loving attention and careful individualized food preparation had, I'm sure, contributed to my recovery.

My hands came automatically together over my heart in the traditional time honored greeting.

"Namaste."

I was met with the usual huge smiles of these small, handsome young men.

"What you like John?"

"First, can you put these karaila in the fridge for later? Do you have any of those beautiful breads you make?" I asked.

"Of course. How many you like?"

"Two, and a hot lemon please."

"We bring soon."

"Thank you." As usual they did not question the fact that I brought some of my own food. At this time I was sprouting various seeds in glass jars on the window sill of my room. I had

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one of these jars with me now. I returned to the restaurant and headed to the back, by the window, to the table beside the yoga lady. As I glanced at her she gave me a small, shy smile and nodded in greeting.

I set my sprouts and a recently purchased tomato on the table. I glanced at my neighbor and saw that she was slicing a cucumber to put on a small round bagel-like bread, the same kind I had ordered.

Norbu brought me my bread and hot lemon.

"Thank you Norbu," I said.

I began to assemble a sandwich, settling comfortably into my lunchtime routine.

"Would you like some cucumber?" The question came from my yoga neighbor. She was smiling in a friendly way. Her English was excellent with the hint of an accent, perhaps Dutch.

"Why yes, thank you. Would you like some sprouts?" I replied.

"Yes."

We shared our feast and soon fell into an easy, absorbing, and broad ranging conversation.

I ordered another hot lemon and Lucia, who was Dutch as I had guessed, ordered yoghurt. I found out that she was a yoga teacher and that she was approaching the end of a five month stay in India, mostly in the lowlands. She had come to the country to learn more about yoga, to gain further insight into this ancient practice that she had been busy with for seven years.

I told her of my interest in learning yoga, and of my rather bizarre introduction to it in New Delhi.

Time flew by. The afternoon was half gone when we got up, paid our bills, and exited together. We lingered by the roadside, reluctant to part. We both obviously enjoyed each other's company.

"Would you like to go for a walk?" I asked.

"Not now. I have some work to do in my room. But tomorrow after breakfast would be OK."

"Great. I'll see you tomorrow." After returning the leftover sprouts to my windowsill, I went for a pleasant walk.

I was awake the next morning at five as was my habit. It was still dark but I could hear the first activity of the locals congregating at the well below the balcony, the water splashing

and spilling, the greetings between friends, and the sounds of hacking and spitting. These latter sounds I had considered to be rude when I was first awakened by similar morning ablutions in Ipoh in Malaysia. Now these sounds fit comfortably into the expanded Asian auditory milieu I had become accustomed to. I could just make out the shadows of people stooping and washing, and filling their water containers.

I made my way to the toilet and then to the outdoor basin for a cold wash and cleaning of teeth and mouth, performed somewhat more quietly and tamely than that of my neighbors at the well below. I met Lucia while washing; she too was up and ready to begin her day.

After my morning exercises, journal writing and breakfast I met Lucia at our prearranged time for a walk.

"Do you have time for a picnic lunch?" I asked.

"Yes. Perhaps we can pick up a few things at the market," she replied.

Thus began what was to become a nearly daily ritual for us.

We walked at a leisurely pace out of town and into the open forested countryside. We enjoyed the scent of pine and watched a villager illegally lop the lower branches from a tree for fuel. The forest had a mutilated look. At least these people left the trees standing, ensuring them of more firewood in the future. It reminded me of the caterpillar stripping the leaves of a plant, but allowing regrowth to occur, even if only for one of his successors, never to be met. Here in the foothills of the Himalayas, cow dung was not so readily available for fuel as it was in the plains. Wood was a scarce and precarious resource.

"Are you going to continue traveling?" Lucia asked. There was some concern in her voice, having heard how sick I had been. She also saw how incredibly thin I still was.

"As a matter of fact I feel the time is coming for me to stop all this wandering. I have a vague dream that has been forming ever since I was in Papua New Guinea; a dream of self sufficiency, of living off the land, of growing my own food, and perhaps using an alternative power source. I don't know where I am to begin this new lifestyle. It might be in New Zealand or perhaps South Africa. It's not clear to me yet. But, you know Lucia, I feel that

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it's just about time for me to find out where this dream is going to take place."

What was it about this woman that made sharing my dreams and my deepest wishes so easy?

We walked on contentedly in silence until we found a charming meadow with a brook playfully burbling over rocks and meandering its way through the sloping grassed area. Finding a reasonably level spot beside the water, I spread out my Balinese blanket and we shared our picnic goodies. The sun was shining in a pleasant comfortable way; birds sang of their spring excitement, a gong could be heard from a distant gomp. We ate and talked in peace.

The next day Lucia had an appointment so we agreed to meet later for an evening meal. I planned to go for a walk on my own.

Since my fevers and chills had so abruptly stopped, my physical recovery had begun in earnest. The days of extreme fatigue became infrequent and my walks gradually lengthened. I felt my strength returning, like a bear woke from hibernation, appetite sated on spring greens. I was encouraged by this. I decided today would be a good day to test my reclaimed vitality so I began walking up the ridge that headed to a viewpoint of the Himalayas. Several travelers had told me of this walk. At the viewpoint was a cluster of shepherds' huts where one could sleep. Most hikers stayed overnight since it was a five to seven hour walk up and something less coming back down. I didn't feel quite ready for such a trek but I thought it would be a challenge to head up the ridge a ways. At this time, my longest walks were two to three hours.

The track up the ridge was suitable for a jeep but I saw no vehicles this day. After ascending the gradual incline for close to an hour the track leveled out and swung around affording a distant view of McLeod Ganj and even a hazy image of the plain beyond and below the Tibetan enclave that was my temporary home. A direct route back to the hotel would have involved a steep scramble down into an intervening valley and an equally steep climb up to McLeod Ganj. That possibility didn't appeal to me. Of course, I could simply retrace my steps and I'd be home in an hour, but the idea of a shortcut or at least an alternative route always appealed to me. From hard-won experience my chosen

shortcuts usually added considerable time to the journey but what they added in time was made up for in interest.

Shortcut through a Swamp

Calgary, July, 1981.

I'm 23. It's my first trip completely on my own. I ease into this independent travel experience by staying with my Aunt Joyce and Uncle Roger at their lovely home in the south-west part of the city of Calgary in Alberta. Joyce and Roger's two sons have already moved out and lead lives of their own. Only Mary, the youngest, is still at home. On a Saturday they decide to take me to Kananaskas, a mountain wilderness area being groomed for the upcoming Winter Olympics.

We drive to a favorite hiking location in steep mountains covered with evergreens and aspen. We walk. We talk. We share a picnic lunch. We reach a fork in the trail. We're all tired.

"If we head off this way we should come out at the car park where we began, and we'll cut off part of that tedious uphill stretch of the trail," I suggest enthusiastically. They don't know of my dubious history with shortcuts and I don't tell them.

"OK John," says Roger.

All is well for half an hour until the trail disappears into a bog.

"This can't be it," says Joyce, sensibly.

"I'm sure it's right through here," I suggest.

"It should be OK," says Mary, giving her mother a little hug.

We advance further, all committed to our decision. The spongy ground gives way to shallow swamp, which in turn gradually deepens. We wade through crystal clear, still water, up to our waists in places. Frogs chortle. Water lilies are in bloom. A muskrat glides by.

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I turn to my relatives, who are trudging along behind me. "Nice place for a walk."

We laugh and giggle with exhaustion, emptying the water from our shoes at the parking area. It is late when we get back to Calgary, tired, wet and happy. We've shared an adventure.

A Message and a Waterfall

Dharmasala, April, 1988.

I decided to continue a little further in the hope of finding another path back to town. Sure enough, after five minutes of somewhat tedious uphill slogging I saw a jeep track forking off to the right. Perhaps this would loop around to McLeod Ganj. I struck off on the new track and soon found myself in low, new growth scrub forest that cut off my ability to see anything but the path ahead. It was an agreeable, mostly level walk but I suspected that it was taking me in the wrong direction. Thus, when I came to a T-intersection I again turned right. This track also wound through low forest, just high enough to block out the view but not the sun, so there were no landmarks to assist with choosing a direction when I reached the next fork. The midday sun was hot and I had worked up a good sweat. I sat down on a rock and savored the last of my water. Which way to go now? With no landmarks and the sun high in the sky I could get no bearings. I went right again. This track also twisted back and forth. After ten minutes more I realized that I was, indeed, lost. I figured that I could probably retrace my steps, but that meant a good two hour walk to get back. With no water remaining in my drink bottle this choice was not very desirable.

Still, I decided to return to the last junction and take the left fork. I reasoned that if this path didn't work out after, say, 10 minutes, I would do my best to return the way I had come, except for detours, of course.

Within a few minutes of easy, level walking I finally broke out of this labyrinth of low trees to find the path perched over a steep drop of scree and stunted shrubs.

Now where am I? I wondered as I stopped to catch my breath. Perhaps the houses peaking through the trees on the far side of the large ravine were on the edge of McLeod Ganj. I contemplated my next step, and was startled out of my reverie by a distant call. I looked up to see a young man walking towards me. He was tall and slim and had dark, medium length hair and a black goatee. A large camera case was hanging over his left shoulder.

"Hi, I'm lost," he said.

"Hi, I'm John," I said. "Nice name!"

He continued, apparently unaware of or undeterred by my attempt at levity. "Do you know the way back to McLeod Ganj? I've been walking around in this maze for the last hour and..." His words trailed off. His voice, with an obvious American accent, carried an edge of concern.

"If it is of any help, I'm lost too; but I think we might be able to cut off the track here and find a shorter way back to town. I'm about to try. Would you like to join me?" I did my best to sound unconcerned.

"I was beginning to think I'd never get back," he replied. "I'm prepared to try anything."

We stepped off the trail and began to scramble down into the ravine. We had to slow down as rocks broke loose, making any movement hazardous. I was relieved when after half an hour of this treacherous descent, we came upon a path that bisected our route, following a contour of the ravine.

"Which way cap'n?" asked my companion, wiping a sweat covered brow with his sleeve.

"Let's go left," I suggested. "It seems to be heading gradually downhill that way."

Off we went, thirsty, tired, but at least able to converse now that we were on more level ground.

"Looks like we'll be together for awhile. As I said, I'm John. What brings you here?"

"My name is Whitney. I arrived in McLeod a couple of days ago. I'm here with a friend to interview the Dalai Lama for a 'Peace' documentary we are filming. I came up this way to

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photograph some of the surrounding landscape. Then I got caught in that labyrinth where I found you, after attempting an alternative route back. That's my story in a nutshell. What brings you here?"

"I was really sick when I came here in February to see Yeshi Dhonden, the renowned Tibetan doctor. With his help I'm beginning to regain my strength."

"You don't seem to be short of energy now."

"You don't know how I feel," I sighed.

Our newfound path made for easier walking but was short lived. It must have been a goat track. It came to a sudden stop at a madly dashing stream.

"I don't care if this hasn't been purified, I'm going to drink this," I said, bending down and scooping up the refreshing, ice cold water with my hands, and refilling my drink bottle.

"Neither do I," replied Whitney as he bent down to quench his thirst. "There's nobody living where this water comes from."

With no path to follow, we began to jump from rock to rock along the stream edge, heading down, reasoning that this watercourse would eventually traverse the hill upon which McLeod Ganj sits, although the stream would likely come out far below the town. All went well until we encountered what appeared at first glance to be an insurmountable obstacle—a waterfall. Despite hindering our progress there was no denying the cascade its beauty. A film of mist was created as the water plunged into a pool far below a formidable cliff. The refraction of sunlight through this mist resulted in startling rainbows.

There was no obvious safe path down so we decided to sit and enjoy this spectacle.

"Aside from recovering from your illness while you've been here, did you attend the series of talks given by the Dalai Lama during Tibetan New Year?" Whitney asked.

"No. I've been more interested in yoga and I've been reading a lot of books on the subject. I've also been so impressed with the effectiveness of Tibetan Medicine that I'm strongly considering studying Chinese Medicine."

"Why not study Tibetan medicine then?"

"It's not really set up to be taught to Westerners. Dr. Barry, an expat Brit who lives here, has been studying for years and he still

has a long way to go. And he's fluent in Tibetan. I'd have to learn the language first. That seems a bit daunting."

"I can imagine. I think I've heard of this Dr. Barry fellow. Is he the guy who sells the ginseng?"

"Yes. He knows a couple of Bhutanese men who harvest wild ginseng from the mountainsides in Bhutan. They then dry it and send it to Barry. I chew little bits of it each day, and I'm convinced it has given me strength. I recommend that you get some before you return to the States. Barry just got a new supply in."

"Thanks for the suggestion, John. I might do that. You speak of yoga. I practice a form of yoga, called Kundalini Yoga, which was brought from India to the West by a Sikh master in 1969. It's vigorous yoga and we do a routine daily for 40 days or more for a specific effect before trying a new set of exercises. I love it. We also get together once a year for what is called White Tantra Yoga. Men and women sit opposite each other in long rows, everyone dressed in white. There are specific mantras that are recited while looking in the eyes of your partner. You can't believe the buzz you get from that. Yogi Bhajan, the founder of the tradition, presides over this day, which takes place at his center outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico."

'Santa Fe.' It was like a bell, or the single, soft, clear note of a nightingale sounding inside my head. For a moment I felt suspended in a timeless realm. It was as if the words 'Santa Fe' triggered some inner knowing. It was as if my very steps were being guided towards a predetermined objective. It was as if in that instant I *knew* that this dream of self sufficiency was going to take place in or near Santa Fe. It was as if all the answers to every question ever asked coalesced into that single note of crystal clarity. There are times in life when one knows, without knowing why, or for that matter, without knowing how. Things happen when we are clear, and clarity comes when we are ready.

Two supposedly lost men meeting each other on a mountain path. A coincidence? I think not. Whitney brought me a gift. He was a messenger sent unbeknownst to him, by the Gods, and I knew now where I was heading—Santa Fe.

I said nothing of this to Whitney. I savored his gift in silence, just as we both silently savored the exquisite beauty before us, this

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waterfall that apparently blocked our path. I was reminded of another time in my life when a waterfall came along unexpectedly.

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25

Potato Pancakes and Leeks

Northern Ontario, April, 1977.

The last snow in Southern Ontario has melted away. Daffodils are blooming. Between tennis games I have managed to complete all the final exams for my first year of university. In the past few months I have been getting reacquainted with Greg, my next door neighbor and best friend for the first ten years of my life in Niagara Falls. Red haired Greg was the daring one. He built forts beside his garage with hammer, nails and saw. Together we explored Dell's Farm, roused crayfish from their dens and returned home with pockets full of frogs. Now Greg is enrolled at Western University and he plans to study law. I visit him in Niagara Falls one weekend. It is my first time back there in many years. We find that we still share a friendship. We also discover we both love canoeing. We plan a canoe trip together for April after exams. Greg knows a good place. The Magnetewan River allows many days of canoeing before reaching Georgian Bay. Greg drives to my parents' home in Oshawa. We borrow the family car, attach our fiberglass canoe to the roof rack, and make the three hour drive to the river. We seal our packs and provisions in garbage bags and lash them and the car keys to the center strut of the dark green fourteen foot canoe. Our first day is magnificent. We pass a handful of riverside houses in the first hour. Then it is

only the river, the forest and us; two strong young men paddling away the stress of exams. Dip and pull. Dip and pull. In rhythmic harmony we plunge our paddles into the icy waters.

"There must have been a lot of snow this winter," says Greg from his seat in the stern. "I've never seen the water quite this high."

I nod assent. Spring is the time of flood in this land of bush and water. Snow melt raises water levels dramatically for a short time. This is that time.

"Let's pull over here before these rapids," calls Greg as he steers the canoe skillfully to shore.

We secure the canoe to a tree and walk the shoreline, observing the white water. Greg has more experience with rapids so I listen intently.

"This looks safe to run," says Greg as we struggle through the bush back to the canoe. Fortunately, it is still too early for the wild herbs and flowers to have begun their mad dash to fill every available space with impenetrable green. We stop to look at the unruly rapids we are now committed to race through.

"There are just a few tricks to do this safely," instructs Greg. "The first is to avoid the rocks."

I laugh with Greg, a little uneasily.

"Rule number two is to aim for the vee."

"What exactly do you mean?" I ask. This looks dangerous and I want to be prepared.

"Look right there," says Greg, pointing to a spot where the water rushed between two jutting rocks. "See how the water forms a vee shape as it accelerates between the rocks?"

"Now I see it," I agree.

"Now look back there. That is also a vee only this time the rocks that cause it are submerged. If we don't steer for the vee we run the risk of hitting an unseen rock that is just below the surface."

That makes sense to me.

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"Rule number three is to paddle like hell when we are in a vee."

"Why?" I ask innocently.

"Because that is where the water is going the fastest. If we don't go fast enough the water can actually overtake the canoe and swamp it."

I am glad to let Greg take the stern steering position for the first rapids. I need time to assimilate and practice these rules.

The river cooperates. It provides plenty of opportunity for practice. We slow before each patch of white water. Sometimes we can see that the risk is low and we verbally agree on the route we will take. Other times we stop and reconnoiter from shore. Several times we decide that the rapids are too dangerous, so we portage around them. It is hard, physical work carrying the canoe and the packs up and around rocks and trees. This is the Canadian Shield, the scarred, rocky remnant of the last ice age, rough and rugged terrain. Here the Carolinian forest dominated by the leafless and dormant maples, birches and oaks intermingles with the evergreen forest creeping down from the north. When we decide to tackle the river Greg is in charge. He barks out instructions as we race between rocks.

"Pull hard left."

"Back paddle right."

"Go like mad."

It is exhilarating. A cool sun is shining. The temperature is only a little above freezing so we don't sweat much despite the hard work. Other than a short lunch break we are on the river all day. Our muscles strain.

We stop before dark and find a reasonably level, moss-covered spot to erect the tent in a copse of birch. We make a fire. Greg's contribution to the meal is a can of spam. It is the first and last time I try this greasy preserved meat. This stuff called spam provides a rare exception to the

rule that everything tastes good when eaten outside. I could be wrong. Maybe it tastes even worse when eaten indoors. I don't want to be the one that finds out. The temperature plummets. We head for the tent and are soon asleep. Who wouldn't be after all that fresh air, exercise and spam?

We wake to a pristine and frigid white world, dusted with a fresh fall of snow. This is all the more motivation to get started and warm our bodies through activity. It is still overcast but the snow has stopped. We quickly get into a rhythm, taking turns at the stern. Once again we take the precaution of sealing our packs and other supplies in garbage bags. The car keys remain firmly affixed to the canoe's center strut. What a great pleasure this is. Late in the morning the river widens into what could be called a small lake. A wetland of browned-off reeds juts out to the left. Near the end of this lake, back off its right hand bank, stands an A-frame house, a line of smoke rising from the chimney to add to the gray of the sky. I mentally note that this is the first dwelling we have seen since the little cluster of cottages glimpsed at the beginning of our trip the day before.

As we approach a narrows at the end of this lake Greg and I look around for a portage sign. These signs are placed and maintained by the Conservation Department for the safety of canoeists. Each sign is an indication that you are about to encounter rapids and that it may be necessary to portage around this obstacle on foot, depending on the conditions and your level of experience.

Until now we have run about half of the rapids where we have seen signs. Each time we have been successful by steering around rocks and paddling quickly to keep the canoe gliding faster than the surrounding water. Otherwise the sorry result is that the boat will fill with water and capsize. This is an outcome we want to avoid at all costs, given the near freezing temperature of the river.

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Once again, before entering the narrows, we cast our eyes about for a sign. There is nothing. I look quizzically at Greg, both of us knowing full well that this is a likely place to find white water. Greg is in the stern. He also looks a little dubious but motions for me to paddle. The river narrows quickly, so quickly that we soon find ourselves in a narrow chute between rock walls just wide enough to paddle in. The full volume of the lake is compressed into this channel, accelerating in speed so that I, being in the bow, have to paddle like a madman to keep up with the white, tumultuous torrent of raging water while Greg has to use all of his considerable skill to keep us on course and off the cliff sides.

“Faster, faster,” yells Greg over the roar of the water. We both know we are trapped. This has all happened so quickly there is no chance to turn back or get out of this hell. It’s as if we’re in a fantastic water-slide at a fun park, only this is no game. I paddle as fast as I can, but it’s no use. The canoe fills with water and the next thing I know we are racing along, still sitting in our little fiberglass boat with icy water up to our waists. This doesn’t last long. The canoe capsizes, taking me under with it. I surface in time to hear Greg’s strained shout above the tumult, “Hold onto the gunnels.” I release my hold on the now superfluous paddle and grab wildly at the canoe. Triumphantlly, I get hold of the gunnels in a vice-like grip. I now lie astride the canoe, like a cowboy on a bronco. But I’m holding on with both hands and I’m not yelling, “Hee Haw.” Somehow in the excitement I’ve been turned around and I now face Greg and the direction from which we have come. Greg faces me, half under the water, also holding the canoe. The noise is deafening. This rock fortress is echoing the sound of the raging river, magnifying the roar of the water crashing through this narrowing chute. Greg’s eyes widen in terror. Oh no, I cry to myself. I hope this isn’t what I think it is. I attempt a quick glance behind me. Even making a slight turn is

exacting as it takes all of my strength and concentration to retain my grip on the bucking canoe. My legs are being constantly rammed between the canoe and submerged and adjacent rocks. The din intensifies. In the instant I manage a look back, my worst fears materialize. I see only mist and sky. We are at the crest of a waterfall of unknown height, ready to plummet!

I think, Nothing is going to tear my hands off this canoe. Canoes always float. There isn't time to examine the veracity of this thought. We shoot over the falls.

I close my eyes, still holding the canoe. Powerful currents grab at me, pulling me down, down... Time stands still. My entire life flashes before my eyes, each event encapsulated in a little frame, like on an eight-mm film strip. I have no idea how long I am actually under water. I seem to be stuck in 'no time', holding the canoe and my breath. Then the film vanishes and I pop up above the water, still holding the canoe. My next breath is surely the sweetest I have had since the moment of my birth 19 years before.

I am floating in a small lake, perhaps forty meters across. The waterfall, that demon of my last breath, is far behind me, half hidden in mist. Greg is bobbing in his life jacket, far down the river. He waves to me. He is alive! The plastic bags containing our gear are floating in the river between us. I see one broken paddle and manage to grab hold of it. I swim towards shore, dragging the canoe behind me. Greg swims over, holding the other paddle, which thankfully is whole. Together we pull the canoe up onto the shore. It takes all our resolve to jump back into the icy water, but this we do in order to salvage our possessions before they float irretrievably away. Together we swim back to shore, drag our cold legs out of the water, and hug each other. In that brief magic moment I vow to never take a day for granted again.

"Anything broken?" I ask.

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"No bones," replies Greg. "Just this one paddle. But I feel like one big bruise."

"Me too."

As we take stock of the situation a mother black bear and her two young cubs watch from a respectful distance. I point at them and say, "I wonder if they enjoyed the show?"

"Surely this has to be the most excitement the young ones have ever experienced," replies Greg with a wry grin.

"I have to say that it's all the excitement I need for a while," I mumble, reaching down to open one of the garbage bags. "Look, Greg. Everything is soaked. What do we do now?"

Greg looks at me, wiping some river weed from his brow, "Let's walk back to that house we saw just before the narrows," he suggests.

"OK." I shiver in response. "We're going to need some help to get our stuff dry. Perhaps we can even make a jerry rig paddle."

Simultaneously Greg and I reach down to turn over the canoe. "The canoe doesn't look great," reports Greg.

That's an understatement, I think, but I say, "I don't see any punctures."

"Look," Greg exclaims, upon closer examination. "The center strut has been knocked out and one floatation chamber has a hole in it." (There was a small floatation chamber at each point of the canoe, theoretically adding to the boat's stability and buoyancy.)

We look sheepishly at each other as we both realize that the car keys had been tied to the center strut, which is now nowhere to be found. There is no way we will ever find the keys in this river, I think to myself. That would be as unlikely as finding a needle in a haystack.

The bears walk away, curiosity sated. I can almost hear the mother say, "Look at the silly things the two leggeds do." We strip down to pants and T shirts before heading off through the bush in the general direction of the house.

It feels great to get our saturated coats and lifejackets off. There are no obvious trails and the thorny bush is dense. By the time we emerge into a clearing by the house after a half hour of bush bashing we are scratched from head to toe. I don't feel the cold after the exertion needed to claw our way through the underbrush. We knock on the door. A man in his thirties answers nonchalantly, as if bloody, wet, half dressed strangers show up every day, "Hi boys. Come on in." He turns and calls, "Hey Martha, take a look at what just appeared at the door." He turns back to us with a big grin. We must look a sight.

His wife arrives, a pretty woman with a ponytail and an apron over her dress. "What's happened to you boys?" There is sympathy audible in her voice.

We take turns explaining as briefly as possible as we drip onto the doormat.

"Come on," the man, Robert, says to us. "Jump into the truck. We'll go get your canoe, clothes and food before the she-bear and family start eating your supplies."

By the time we get back to the house in the late afternoon we are exhausted. All the adrenalin that has kept us going until now has been expended. A warm shower feels like heaven. The meal has to be the best I have ever tasted. It is simple, hearty food grown in Robert and Martha's garden. Potato pancakes and leeks. Food never tasted this good. We share stories over the meal with Robert, Martha and their young son and daughter. The whir of the dryer can be heard in the background, spinning the damp out of our clothes and sleeping bags. Greg and I are dressed in spare clothes of Robert. A warm fire crackles in the fireplace. I am overwhelmed with waves of gratitude for these kind people who have never hesitated to do whatever they can to make us comfortable. Sleep comes early and lasts long when Greg and I crawl into the spare beds upstairs.

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The next morning we dress in our own clothes, which we find neatly folded at the end of the beds. We go downstairs to join the family for a warm breakfast.

"Morning boys," smiles Robert.

"Morning all," we say in unison.

"I'm curious," I go on. "Why didn't we see a portage sign before the waterfall?"

"We had a lot of snow this past winter. Then we had a couple of unseasonably warm weeks in late March and early April. The snow melt then caused the river to rise very high. That led to a huge flood two weeks ago. The portage sign must have been torn off the tree during the flood," Robert informs us. "By the way, first thing this morning while you two were having your beauty sleep, I managed to lash a board on to the end of your broken paddle. That should work for whoever is sitting in the stern."

"Thanks," I say, feeling almost overwhelmed by the support we're receiving.

After eating we pack up our now clean and dry gear. I want to take a photo of our rescuers. I find out that my mother's camera is inoperable due to the soaking it has received.

Robert and Dan, the eleven-year-old son, drive us to a spot just below where we had dragged ourselves out of the river the day before.

"Go easy and stay safe, boys," says Robert.

"We'll do that," assures Greg.

"Thanks again for all your help," I say. "It is really appreciated." I notice that Robert has done another job without our knowing it. The canoe has been bent back close to its original shape.

We head off tentatively on this still, sunny morning. The last of the mist hangs over the water. An otter plays gleefully in a tranquil riverside pool.

It turns out to be a day of many portages. Understandably, we take no chances with any

questionable rapids. I notice that my enthusiasm to continue has waned. I've had enough adventure for now. Like a baseball batter who has been hit by a pitch, I know it is important to get back in there and confront more white water. But on a soul level I know that I have experienced that which is necessary. Something changed inside me when I was under water. That was why I had come on this trip. I didn't need to go further.

Late in the afternoon, after a particularly long and tiring portage we arrive at a beautiful camping spot on a spit of land in a large lake. We set up the tent and eat by a campfire made from driftwood.

"Hey Greg. Tomorrow's our fourth day. How much longer is it to Georgian Bay?" I ask.

"Our escapade on the waterfall set us back a bit. After the lake there's probably another two days of paddling."

"Is there a marina on this lake?"

"Yes. On the other side."

"Why don't we paddle over there in the morning and I'll call my Dad to ask if he can bring up a spare set of car keys. It's Sunday, and though he won't necessarily be very pleased, he would at least not have to take time off work."

"That's a reasonable plan," responds Greg. "I don't mind shortening our trip."

The next morning against a strong, steady wind we forge our way across the lake. After close to two hours of steady, hard paddling we reach the marina. As we approach the shore I feel a prick in my arm.

"Ouch," I exclaim.

"Black flies," says Greg, swatting at his arm. "It's that time of year."

Just standing at the pay telephone calling my parents we are getting eaten alive. Dad says he will be on his way shortly once I explain the circumstances and where we are.

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"But it will take me three hours to get there, son," he says. I hear a little irritation in his voice but, typical of my father, he doesn't hesitate to help.

"We'll be waiting," I say, swinging my arms at the little black demon kamikazes flying around me.

"These hills and trees are blocking all the wind, making this a perfect place for black flies, and this is their time," reiterates Greg, sounding disgusted.

"Let's walk down this road," I suggest. "They don't seem to get us when we're moving."

For the next three hours, while waiting for my father's arrival, Greg and I walk up and down the forested lane leading from the marina to the main road. In this way we avoid getting 'eaten alive'. Dad drives us back to where we had left the car and we head home after an experience we will never forget.

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26

Finding Our Way

Dharmsala, April, 1988.

“**L**ook!”

I followed with my eyes to where Whitney was pointing. Out of apparent nothingness two ragged peasants had materialized beside the pool of water at the base of the cascade.

Using my hands and eyes to form a question, I yelled over the roar of the water, “McLeod Ganj,” knowing instinctively these two scantily clad, tiny, wiry men would understand no English.

Their eyes registered instant comprehension, and with sign language they indicated a steep way off to our left. We would not have seen this without their help. They continued to yell out and guide our prolonged but steady progress down the sheer mountainside. Before we knew it we were standing beside our saviors, safe but shaking with nervous excitement.

Our relieved smiles conveyed our thanks. What were these men with their sun-darkened skin and calloused bare feet doing here? Were they goatherds? My mind was filled with questions.

I asked again, “McLeod Ganj?” and they immediately gestured for us to follow them over what, to my eyes, was not a path. These two men may have looked very poor and emaciated, but they displayed the fitness and agility of Olympic marathoners or perhaps, more aptly, mountain goats as they ascended nimbly from rock to rock out of the valley in which they found us. They obviously knew where they were going. Whitney and I called on our last reserves of energy to keep up with these two ‘old goats’.

Our scrambling progress brought us to a proper path on a forested hillside. Here our guides left us with smiles and waves. They turned, and as quickly as they had appeared, they were gone.

When we finally limped back into McLeod Ganj it was nearly nine hours from the time I had set out in the morning. After a well deserved meal with a concerned Lucia I returned to my room. Briefly I reflected on the day. Once again a shortcut had turned into something completely unexpected, and far from short. The exhaustion I felt was scant payment for the message I believe I had received. I now had a destination in mind. Santa Fe. I slept soundly as one always does after fresh air and exercise. I had had plenty of both.

Himalayan Yoga

"I can teach you yoga if you like." Lucia and I were enjoying another picnic the following day after a short, easy hike. Lucia had put up no resistance to my suggestion for a less than lengthy walk. I had filled her in on the events of the previous day as she listened in rapt fascination. Lucia continued, "I would agree with Whitney. You seem to be pretty fit now."

"I suppose, if nothing else, yesterday showed me that I have regained a lot of my former strength. I'm getting ready to walk all the way to Triand one of these days. Would you like to join me?"

"Yes, but not yet. Perhaps in a week or so, weather permitting, I would like to do that. I hear you really see the Himalayas from there."

"Yes, that's what I heard as well," I agreed.

We spent the rest of the afternoon going over a set of simple yoga exercises suitable for an inflexible beginner like me. I don't remember ever being able to touch my toes. My father and I used to compare who could bend forward with legs straight and get the closest to their toes with their fingers.

Lucia spoke at length about breathing, emphasizing the importance of nose breathing. I was glad I had begun to consciously breathe through my nose these last months. It was an effort and I often found myself slipping back into my old pattern

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of mouth breathing. Lucia explained that, according to ancient yogic scriptures, there are glands or receptors located in the nostrils that accept the prana, or energy, from the air. The energy thus absorbed enters subtle bilateral channels and is eventually distributed throughout the body. Lucia could see that my breathing was relatively shallow and mostly just reached my upper chest. I could see I still had a lot of work to do.

Finally, Lucia outlined the importance of a long and deep relaxation after completing a set of yoga asanas. It was at this time while slowly, deeply and consciously breathing that the energy one had stirred up and invigorated through the postures had an opportunity to reach out to the extremities of the body, even on a cellular level.

“What do you think, John? Is that enough to get you started?” Lucia asked as I slowly rolled onto my side and returned to a seating position. I had just completed my first true yoga set and relaxation and I felt energetic, calm, and intensely alert.

“Yes. So long as you help me now while I write down the exercises and their order,” I replied.

“Remember: it’s not important how far you can bend in each posture. Yoga is a totally personal system, totally non-competitive. Only you know what is appropriate for your body. What is important is consistency. Try to establish a particular time and place and practice daily. In a sense it is like intentionally creating a beneficial habit. Through daily, deliberate practice, without pushing, you will become more flexible, according to your body’s schedule, and to the extent that is appropriate for you.

“And you will come to see that yoga is about far more than physical flexibility. It is about poise, patience, and even strength. It is about openness and receptivity, something sadly lacking in many ‘modern’ men and women. And John ...”

“Yes?”

“A flexible body is a flexible mind. In a sense yoga is like returning home. You become more yourself, more of who you are, on a deep level.”

“Sounds good to me. Thank you.”

I was anxious to put these lessons into practice, and the next morning, in the place of the push-ups and sit-ups I had been doing daily since my teens, I went through my personal yoga routine and

relaxation. After, when I got up to go breakfast, I was astounded at how energetic I felt—a huge improvement from the spent, tired sensation I would have after ‘regular’ exercises. I saw Lucia at breakfast.

“I can’t believe how great I feel after the yoga. I feel really energized,” I told Lucia.

“Wonderful. It’s not always that obvious. Did you do a long relaxation?”

“Yes.”

“That’s just as important as the exercises. I think you’ve found something that suits you, John. You may do this for a long time.”

How prophetic Lucia’s words have proven to be.

There was a repeat of the energized feeling I had the next morning when I did the routine again. I had worked out on weights three times a week for several years before I began traveling, including my time in Saudi Arabia. Now, I noticed this remarkable feeling of lightness the very first time I did the yoga asanas and relaxation. In time yoga vastly improved my flexibility and helped to restore strength after my debilitating illness. Only after continuing with yoga for years did I come to understand that the improved flexibility in my body corresponded to an increased flexibility and openness in thinking and especially in relating to myself and others. But the remarkable and noticeable effect of the yoga from the very first day that I did it was this increase in vital energy that I experienced. In agreement with Lucia, I put this down to the relaxation of at least 10 minutes that involved lying flat on my back after completing the short series of positions. This deep relaxation is called Savasana.

In the first six months I applied these yoga exercises twice daily, and in that time I discovered just how flexible I could become. Yoga and meditation remain an essential starting point to my day. The techniques have evolved and developed in the course of the past twenty years, but the essence remains the same. These beautiful habits remain my morning treat, perhaps not as aromatic as a cup of coffee, but with a greater long term benefit.

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Another Coincidence

Once again I found myself pulled by more than gravity to the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, a three storey white stucco building, nestled on the hillside midway between McLeod Ganj and Dharmasala. Aside from the sort of independent study I was engaged in, scholars at the library gave courses in Tibetan language, history and religion.

When the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan citizens he represented were granted the opportunity to settle here by Nehru back in 1959, who would have thought that by dint of persistence and unflagging effort the Tibetans would have created the comprehensive Tibetan enclave I experienced? There were monasteries representing each of the four major sects in Tibetan Buddhism, the Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute, the Dolmaling Nunnery, the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, clinics, shops, restaurants, hotels, and this wonderful library. All these structures stood as testament to the indomitable spirit of these people who have refused to succumb to inertia despite being forced from their homeland to live in this remote hill station of India. I sometimes wonder if the great Tibetan teachers would have reached out and touched the rest of the world as much as they have if China had never invaded their Tibetan homeland. A tragedy for the Tibetans has proven to be a blessing for the rest of humanity.

This day I decided to peruse the magazines that graced a stand in the main hall. I hadn't looked at them before. I picked up the most recent copy of *East West*, a journal comparing holistic health and spiritual issues of East and West.

I was pleasantly surprised to find an article that discussed Traditional Chinese Medicine, something I was considering studying. At the end of the article was a list of Chinese Medical schools in North America. To my bemusement two of these schools were located in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Another coincidence? I noted the addresses of these two schools and, later, having hiked back up to the hotel, I shared this information with Lucia and our new friend Gary over a meal at the Green Restaurant.

The Wisdom Tree

Dr. Gary D. Guthrie had just completed an assignment teaching English in Saudi Arabia. Gary had written a book on comparative world religions. For a good part of his adult life he had wandered the globe, part of a growing group of teachers of English as a foreign language. While in McLeod Ganj he joined a residential Buddhist retreat at the Tushita Center above town. At Gary's request, I read his excellent book, *The Wisdom Tree*, and gave him feedback on it.

With his retreat complete, he joined Lucia and me for meals and conviviality.

"Gary, I thoroughly enjoyed the book," I said. "How did you come to write such a book?"

"I was living and teaching in Singapore where I was surrounded by all these people with different religions: Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam. I was teaching a course on religion and I would have the students write papers on their religions and religious experience. Then at the University of La Verne in the Philippines I was asked what I would like to teach and I chose 'Comparative World Religions'. The book grew out of my course notes and research."

"But what of your own experience? Why the interest in all of these religions?" I asked.

"That's very personal. When I was a teenager I was involved in a car accident in which my brother was killed. I felt I was partly responsible for his death. I was shattered by the experience. I needed help and that help came from my grandfather and his Mormon Church. That support was what I needed at the time. Later in my early twenties I began to wonder how a church with only two million members could have all the answers when there were billions of people in the world with different beliefs."

"So, why do we have religions?"

"Albert Einstein felt there was 'Something' behind life. He called it 'The Impenetrable'. Another phrase he used was 'The Mystical'. People have always sensed this 'Something' behind that which is seen. True religion is aligned with the mystical—or a felt oneness with Life."

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“But Gary,” I persisted. “Why do we have all the different religions, and why the conflicts between them? Heck, even some of the Christian churches don’t get along and don’t agree on basic points of theology.”

“Ah, that word ‘theology’,” Gary warmed to his subject. “Have you heard of Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher who proposed the Israeli and Palestinian League to share peace decision-making in the Middle East?”

“No.”

“He said that true religion is experiencing a felt oneness with the Divine—the rest is theology. Look at five of the founders of religions—Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Moses, and Lao Tze. They were each in contact with the Ultimate Reality. They experienced something that is really beyond words, which is inexpressible, although we can try with words like Light, Love, and Beauty. Their followers wrote the theology and interpretations many decades, sometimes even centuries, after the original experience.”

I could certainly relate to the inexpressibility of the Divine. I hadn’t attempted to share it with anyone at this time. “Many of these interpreters would not have been reporting from personal experience, would they?” I asked.

“No. Also, they were living in different social and political times,” said Gary.

“Gary, one of the things in your book that I resonated with was that there is an essential unity in what most of the religions teach—like the Golden Rule.”

“Yes. Each speaks of the importance of loving kindness. And what I find amazing is that the major religions of Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam have managed to come up with the exact same steps in their paths towards enlightenment and salvation.”

“Really! What are they?”

“First: Recognize a Divine Force that is behind all life; call it Christ, God, Brach man or whatever.

“Second: Purify your life. Set your ego aside.

“Third: Detach yourself from harmful influences that would give you a feeling of separation from the Divine.

“Fourth: Dedicate yourself to the path, or stay the course.”

“Is this like the Buddhist idea of taking refuge?”

“Yes it is. In Buddhism it’s called ‘The Three Pearls’: I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the Dharma. I take refuge in the Sangha. You could as easily say: ‘I take refuge in Enlightenment, the Teachings, and the Spiritual Community of like-minded souls.’

“One more thing, John. All these Buddhas we see around here are smiling the ‘Buddha smile’. Thich Nhat Hahn, the Vietnamese monk, says that the smile comes from the enlightened view that we can smile at our sorrows and problems because we are greater than them. Eventually we can smile at sickness, old age, and death because of their temporary nature.”

I thought about this conversation often and I could see that each of the religions, each of the systems, has something to offer. One could glean the best from all that was available, as long as one’s principal focus didn’t get diluted. At the heart of all belief systems is a core of unity. It is only at the periphery that the differences get accentuated and turned into reasons for conflict. How could one experience the Divine and not love all beings?

Land of Enchantment

One afternoon, after a pleasant walk, I decided to sit in a restaurant in town and catch up on my journal writing over a hot drink. I had never visited this restaurant before. Being between mealtimes the venue was empty save for the proprietor and me.

“Tashi Delek. May I have a hot ginger please?”

The young Tibetan at the counter returned my greeting and brought me the beverage after I settled down at a table to write. I wrote and wrote. Suddenly I noticed music playing for the first time. It was a beautiful and melodic instrumental composition completely new to me. I loved it. It seemed most restaurants played an eclectic mix of rock and reggae. You heard Bob Marley everywhere.

I jumped up and approached the owner.

“What’s that music?” I asked.

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He handed me the empty cassette case with a photocopied cover. It was called *Land of Enchantment* by the German musician Deuter. I had never heard of him.

"I really like the song that is playing now," I continued. "Do you know which one it is?"

"Yes. It's the first song on side two."

I scanned the names of the songs and had to smile when my eyes came to rest on the name of the first song on side two: *Santa Fe*.

I returned to the table and wrote in my journal, *I'm getting the point*.

That evening I shared this information with Lucia and Gary over yet another meal at the Green Restaurant.

John P. Haines



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Is this Suffering?

The time for our hiking adventure arrived. Lucia and I shopped together at the market in McLeod Ganj and at stalls in Dharmasala for provisions. We left early the next morning for our long uphill walk. It was a perfect spring day. I couldn't ask for better company. By now Lucia and I had become good friends. Midway we stopped for a picnic lunch of raw vegetables, bread and nuts. We walked on and on, arriving at the top not long before dark. We staked a claim on a dilapidated shepherd's hut on 'somewhat' uneven ground. I'm being generous. It was a rough hillside. At least we had a roof over our heads.

We shared another simple, but satisfying uncooked meal outside before retreating to the shelter of the hut as darkness descended. It was decidedly cooler than back in town. There was a nip to the air. We talked. Again I marveled at how easy it was to share my dreams and ideas with this woman. And I enjoyed listening to her stories.

"Lucia. I haven't been in an ashram in India. I have spoken with a few people who have been in Sai Baba's ashram in the south of India, and one man who has been to Rajneesh's ashram. What has your experience been like with yoga here?"

"In a word, disappointing, until recently."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"I came to India to see where yoga came from. It seems to me that many ashrams in India are geared to making money from Westerners. This is just my experience and I'm sure that's not how they all are. In fact, I just spent four weeks in Puri that were wonderful."

“Where’s Puri?”

“On the east coast, roughly south of Calcutta. There were all these big name ashrams. I personally didn’t feel attracted to them. Then, one day, I found this little ashram, almost by accident. I just knew I was in the right place. The Mother, the spiritual head of the ashram, looked at me in a special way. The look in her eyes was *the* experience for me in India. I don’t think her English was very good. She put me on to a younger man, a Swami. He was very good to me. I learned much just being in his presence. I stayed in a lovely room in a little house on the beach with mostly Indians around me. The Swami gave me a mandala before I left.”

“Oh. Is that what you are wearing as a necklace?” I asked.

“Yes.” Lucia went on, “He also gave me a set of breathing exercises and a mantra meditation to practice. I feel really lucky to have met him. He was a simple man but a wise one. He gave me some advice that fits. He said I can get married, but only once.”

I laughed, “That strikes me as sound but not such special advice.”

“Oh but I think it is,” Lucia continued. “You see, I’ve had some funny, or should I say unpleasant experiences with men. Prior to meeting the Swami I said to myself that I won’t get involved with another man until I know for sure he’s the one. I need time for me. I am not getting involved with anyone else now.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” I said. “You’re happy by yourself, aren’t you?”

“Yes. I haven’t always been, but I am now.”

“Me too.”

Lucia had shared her feelings with me as a friend. I wondered if she was making it clear that this night together in this isolated hut was just between friends. I was definitely interested in her as a woman, but I too was reluctant to tinker with this easy friendship we both so clearly enjoyed.

I slept soundly on the hard, uneven ground; reasonably comfortable, warm and alone in my sleeping bag.

Dawn. The sun was fighting through the uneven cracks in this dirty and rickety structure. Sounds of people and animals poured

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through the same cracks. This hilltop world was coming to life, urging us to do the same.

"How did you sleep?" I asked Lucia.

"Not bad, but not great," said Lucia. "You rolled over at some point and your arm came over me."

"It wasn't intentional," I grinned. "I was asleep. I was just subconsciously ensuring I didn't roll down the hill."

"That's alright," she smiled. "At least you didn't snore...too loud."

"Ah, come on. I don't snore." I laughed. "Were you warm enough?"

"Yes."

We packed up and decided to take a little stroll to warm up our stiff bodies. We were very near the top of a grassy, rock strewn ridge. Goats kept the grass cropped. We could see all the way back to McLeod Ganj. When we walked to the very top of the ridge we were greeted with a spectacular view of the white massif of the Himalayas. Crest upon jagged ice covered crest reflected the early sun. It was as if the earth was resplendent in a tiara of shimmering diamonds. We had walked to the edge of magic.

"Not bad, eh?" I stated the obvious.

"It doesn't get any better than this," exclaimed Lucia.

I couldn't have said it better myself.

We returned to our hut and sat down to break our fast. We lay back on the grass, watching scattered cumulus drifting by. The early sun felt nurturing. It had been a lovely way to start the day. Again, I had to wonder about one of the principal tenets of Buddhism that says that life is suffering.

"Life is suffering," I sighed.

"Yes. Life is suffering," said Lucia. We smiled at each other.

"Have you ever heard the story of Jonathon?" I asked.

"No."

I began, "Jonathon was a simple farmer in Judea; a happy man. Then he experienced a series of calamities. I don't remember the details, but there was a devastating drought and he lost all his crops. His wife died quite young from an illness. He was forced to rebuild the farm and raise the children on his own after the drought. Other things went wrong. To make a long story short, all the children died. Jonathon continued to farm. Despite all of his

difficulties, the neighbors noticed that Jonathon was still happy. He could often be heard singing while he worked. Word of this strange man reached everyone in the area.

"There was a group of elderly rabbis who had been holed up in a room for weeks discussing theological points to update the Talmud, which is a book containing commentary on their holy book, the Torah. All went well until they began to discuss suffering. They couldn't reach any kind of agreement. Gridlocked, one suggested they talk to Jonathon about suffering. None of them knew of anyone who had had to endure as much as Jonathon. So the pundits walked out to Jonathon's farm. They found him working under the hot sun, singing.

"What brings you here?" he asked.

"Their leader replied, 'Jonathon, we were hoping you could help us. We have been unable to reach agreement on the meaning of suffering. We hope you can help us with this delicate point, after all you've been through.'

"Jonathon stopped his hoeing and looked with his friendly eyes from one man to another.

"I'm sorry,' he said, 'I cannot help you. I am not suffering.'"

"I like that," said Lucia.

A herder walked over with a glass bottle of milk.

"You want?" he asked.

I looked at Lucia. She nodded. "How much?" I asked.

"Ten rupees."

I handed him the money and reached for the bottle. It was warm. "Thanks," I said.

"Feel this," I said, handing the bottle to Lucia. "It doesn't get any fresher than this."

She took a drink. "It doesn't taste any better than this."

We looked at each other. We were sharing a little slice of heaven, right here on earth.

We got up to go. There was group of Westerners clustered around a fire nearby. They must have slept in the other huts just below us. One of this group got up and walked over to us. She looked at the half empty milk bottle.

"Hi. That fresh goat's milk is pretty amazing stuff, isn't it?" I said.

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“Yes,” she agreed. “Did you boil it first?”

“Should we have?” asked Lucia.

“Yes. That milk you had was fresh and raw. Most of our digestive systems aren’t accustomed to it,” she explained.

“Thanks for the words of warning,” I said. “Unfortunately, we’ve already finished half of the milk.”

“Well, I hope it works out OK for you. Some of us were pretty cramped up after having raw milk yesterday. Are you staying another night?”

“No,” said Lucia. “We’re going to start down now.”

The cramps began for both of us later in the day. Thank God the walk was all downhill. By the time we returned to the Green Hotel in mid afternoon we were both just about doubled over in pain. But we were laughing and we’d had a great day. Isn’t it interesting how hell can so closely follow heaven? But is this suffering? If one is comfortable with discomfort, if one can be content with pain, then, I believe, there is no suffering. It is only in the resistance to the pain that suffering occurs. It is only when we want the situation to be different than it is, that we suffer.

Tumbled Turquoise

All good things come to an end. Actually, everything in this world, good or bad, comes to an end. My time had arrived to say goodbye to Dharmasala. My Indian visitor’s permit was due to expire, so I decided, without much difficulty I might add, to return to the Hunza in Pakistan. After three months in Pakistan I would be legally able to return to India and McLeod Ganj.

I made a final stop to see Yeshi Dhonden. He loaded me up with a three month supply of herbal rabbit droppings. I now felt confident that I was well on the way to making a full recovery. My walk to Triand with Lucia had been a test of my endurance, and I passed with flying colors. Lucia was due to move on as well and would attempt to meet me in New Delhi before my departure for Pakistan. There was trouble brewing in the Punjab, and she therefore decided to take the longer route by train via Pathankot to avoid any chance of contact with violence. This route was being

recommended. The night bus through the Punjab was cancelled due to the violence, but I was able to get a seat on the early bus.

I sat with Gary and Lucia in a little restaurant beside the bus pickup point before sunrise. We were enjoying hot lemon drinks and fresh baked whole meal bread.

"Remember, Lucia, when you get home get your hands on those two great books and read them," I suggested.

"Two books?" she asked. "I remember you suggesting Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*. What was the other again? I'll write it down." She got out a notepad and pen.

"The book was called *Initiation* and it was written by the Swiss yoga teacher, Elisabeth Haich. She wrote several books about yoga in collaboration with Selvarajan Yesudian. *Initiation* is her autobiography of her present day European life, and of a life she experienced in Egypt. She spoke of how you have to save or heal yourself before you save or heal the world."

"Thanks John. I remember now."

We all enjoyed this last time sitting together in a restaurant. The bus arrived. It was time to go. I loaded my backpack in the boot and turned to say goodbye to my friends. Lucia handed me a small package.

"Ah. That is sweet," I said. I carefully tore the paper and found a necklace of black leather threaded through a small piece of tumbled Turquoise. Lucia helped me with the clasp as I put it on.

"I hope you enjoy it. The Tibetans use Turquoise in a lot of their handcrafts. It is a symbol of friendship."

"I will cherish it."



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Musical Misadventures

Back in New Delhi I arranged for a three month visitor's permit for Pakistan. I also arranged for a tailor in Pahar Ganj to fashion a bag out of pliable white canvas to hold my musical cassettes. I saw Lucia briefly again. She accompanied me to the bus that would return me to Pakistan via Lahore. We agreed to write to each other. She would be returning to Amsterdam soon.

On the half empty (or half full) bus I befriended a tall American traveler, Rick. He was in his mid twenties. I told him of my love of the Hunza and he said that I might see him there. After a subsequent bus trip to Islamabad I made my way to the airport to secure a flight to Gilgit. I was told this was not possible due to fighting. No further explanation was given. I received the same answer when I inquired about taking the bus. I knew there was no sense in arguing so I journeyed by bus to Peshawar, and from there headed to Chitral. This was a scenic valley surrounded by rugged mountains. There were no other Westerners around and the place captivated me not at all. I simply longed to return to the Hunza, and to this end I boarded a bus bound for the main road that ran between Islamabad and Gilgit. I reasoned and hoped that I could get to my beloved Hunza in this way.

The bus was full, so I clambered on top, joining the fifteen or twenty men already seated there. We wound alongside a river in a picturesque, sparsely populated grassy valley. I felt safe jammed between all these men. There was little danger of falling and no overhead wires to look out for. I sat cradling my small pack which contained my walkman, a book, toiletries, and dried fruit and nuts. My larger back pack was also on top of the bus, although I

couldn't see it through the mass of unsmiling men. I sat comfortably enough, taking in the scenery and mentally reviewing my travels to this point. I had divested myself of my camera while in Delhi the first time. More and more I had seen it as a hindrance to being present and simply enjoying what was around me. During the course of this four hour trip, I decided it was time to sell my walkman. It had provided me with company and the distraction of music on long trips or when waiting for transport. In the last few months I had rarely used it. Perhaps Gandhi's philosophy of simplification of material possessions was rubbing off on me. I knew only that I didn't want to carry what I didn't want or need.

At our destination I was told in no uncertain terms that I could not proceed to Gilgit. The road north was blocked by army vehicles and soldiers. I was temporarily disappointed that my plan to reach the Hunza had failed. I booked into the only available lodgings, a pleasant enough place with a basic but adequate restaurant. Tall trees shaded the central courtyard.

When extracting my sleeping bag from my pack I noticed a strap hanging out of the upper zippered pouch. *That's funny*, I thought. *That's not how I left it*. I unzipped the pouch and found, to my surprise, that the new canvas bag carrying my cassettes was missing. In the confusing rooftop melee of our departure from the bus, one of my fellow passengers had obviously hastily grabbed it, mistaking it for a money belt, which it closely resembled. In all my years of travel I had never been robbed, and I found it remarkable that at the very time I had decided to sell my walkman, my bag with cassettes had been stolen. One's thoughts are obviously powerful tools of manifestation. I wondered how much one's outer experience was shaped by inner dialogue and desires.

I had little choice but to sell my walkman now—there was nothing left to listen to. This I did in the next mountain outpost I spent time in—the Khagan Valley. At the same time I couldn't help but feel for the person who had stolen the cassettes. He wouldn't likely be able to listen to them, or even like the style of music if he did have access to a player. He would have much preferred cash.

I reached the Kaghan Valley via Abbottabad. Each day I went for long walks and reveled in the pristine mountain scenery. I

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enjoyed watching the nomadic Gujar people, men, women and children, walking with their small herds along the only available road to the summer pastures above. The lambs were carried in comfort most of the way. I noticed that I wasn't really interested in new mountain scenery or different ethnic groups. I longed only to return to the Hunza. After a week I took a jeep back out to Abbottabad and headed north by bus to Gilgit. This time I was allowed through.

Return to Shangri La

Northern Pakistan, June, 1988.

Gilgit looked the same as I remembered. There was no sign of damage, although I heard rumors that exiles from the war in Afghanistan had penetrated this far in an unsuccessful attempt to take over the Hunza as a new homeland for their families. Armed men had arrived in Gilgit from Karimabad, Altit and other villages to bolster local forces. Word had it that the Afghan insurgents had been defeated in a battle just outside Gilgit. The Pakistani Army had assisted in the end by imprisoning captured rebels. On hearing this news, I was grateful that I had been turned back in my earlier attempts to reach Gilgit.

My first trip to this verdant mountain oasis had been at the time of the leaves falling the previous autumn. I had feasted on the rich barley breads and porridges that are so sustaining for these hardy, outdoor people. I had watched the people drying their harvested apricots and mulberries on their flat rooftops and I had tasted these delicious, sweet dried fruits together with the apricot kernels and walnuts that are also part of their winter sustenance. I had read accounts of earlier visitors to these regions who had seen how the Hunza people traditionally nearly ran out of stored food each spring. This forced them into an annual involuntary fast before the new crops of potatoes, vegetables, grains and fruits could be harvested in the late spring and early summer. Most Hunzas ate meat for special feasts once or twice a year. Their sheep were far too precious as sources of wool and dairy products

to be killed more than occasionally for meat. The people were, thus, almost by default, vegetarians. Most families had just a few sheep, or perhaps a goat and a cow, and these were patiently led from one paddock to another. The animals played integral roles in the survival of each family.

I had also read that the Hunzas had long been horticulturists of excellence who had practiced and perfected the grafting of fruit trees for generations. They had developed cultivars of apricots suited to their varying purposes: some for fresh eating and others for drying; some for their sweet kernels and others for oil. Whereas modern orchardists in Western lands removed old trees and replanted orchards every thirty-five years or less, the Hunzas had developed specialized pruning practices that included sawing old trees to just above the graft after they had been in production for fifty years. In this way a tree would regain its vigor, send out new shoots, and remain productive for another fifty years. I had also witnessed how the Hunzas had been using permacultural methods long before the term 'permanent agriculture' had been coined. One would see grapevines sprawling happily over a spreading white mulberry tree. Every available patch of ground was utilized to its fullest.

I left Gilgit on one of the gaudily painted minibuses only Pakistanis can make. These little vehicles have a bench on each side. They are just wide enough to allow the knees of the people seated on one side to touch the knees of the people seated opposite. There are often young men hanging precariously on to the roof and sides if the benches are full. The benches are often full.

We began our journey hugging the gray and barren cliffs, often perched hazardously over the Hunza River, now roiling violently with the late spring melt. Nothing on my previous autumn visit had prepared me for the brilliant green of the Hunza Valley in early summer, glimpsed as we rounded a corner after driving through the gray Karakorum rock for more than two hours. The verdure and vitality of the small and lush green terraces, gardens and trees was almost palpable, even from this first distant glimpse. This was truly a paradise on Earth. In James Hilton's 1933 classic, *Lost Horizon*, Shangri-la was such a paradise. It was a beautiful hidden valley in the Himalayas. In this valley there was no crime

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and no sickness, and the people lived long lives in perfect happiness. I remember discussing in high school whether such a utopia could exist. Perhaps it did and still does exist in the Hunza of yesterday and today. Perhaps the Hunza Valley was the inspiration for James Hilton's book.

Major-General Sir Robert McCarrison served many years in the British Army Indian Medical service in the early 1900s. He was responsible for the wellbeing of the Indian troops. He soon noticed that the health of the Indian population varied enormously from one region to another. McCarrison considered the Hunzas, Pathans and Sikhs to be the finest specimens of humanity he had ever seen. He observed that the ailments common in his own people were extraordinarily uncommon amongst the Hunzas. In his nine years of practice with these mountain people, he came across not one case of cancer.

We stopped for tea in the first Hunza village we came upon and sat in the shade of a large spreading pomegranate tree in full, brilliant orange blossom. I was smitten. I had had a feeling for some time that this was going to be a special trip and I was anxious to justify this intuition. All of my difficulties in the last weeks and my repeated and thwarted attempts to reach this destination seemed worthwhile as I jumped out of the minibus in Karimabad. I had made it and it felt like a homecoming of sorts.

Since I was armed with a ninety day Pakistani visitor's permit I still had over two months to look forward to in the Hunza. I decided to spend a little extra in order to set up a comfortable home base for my coming adventures. I found a room with two beds in one of Karimabad's budget hotels. This charming little backpacker hotel had several rooms built around a central courtyard. The courtyard was open on one side, allowing for an uninterrupted view of Mount Rakiposhi and the breathtaking Hunza Valley. The hotel was managed by Mansour, a friendly, respectful and helpful young man in his early twenties. I asked if he could take the one bed out of my room. He kindly agreed, simply using the bed to create a three bed dormitory in one of the more spacious rooms across the courtyard from my room. The space previously occupied by the bed became my yoga and meditation area. At this stage I was doing a full yoga set, as

prescribed by Lucia, every morning and most afternoons. As I had done in India, I began to grow sprouts in jars on a window sill, and, over time, enjoyed sharing salads with visitors seated on the floor. The room had a simple but functional attached toilet, basin and cold water shower—almost all the comforts of home.

I settled into a simple daily rhythm of rising before dawn, washing and shaving (I only dared the cold shower weekly), yoga and meditation. I would visit the hotel dining room for breakfast and for procurement of provisions for a picnic lunch. I usually managed to obtain a beautiful, tasty loaf of solar-baked barley bread every few days. Sometimes Mansour provided me with fresh spinach and carrots from the hotel garden. In the course of time I came to know other villagers. One young man from the nearby village of Altit became a friend. He would come by every week or so with fresh vegetables from his garden. My sprouts provided additional live greens. All this was supplemented with once-weekly trips to the Gilgit market for fruits of the season. Most days I enjoyed long walks, usually returning in mid-afternoon. Then, after yoga and a rest, I would join other travelers at one of the local restaurants for an evening meal. I was amazed at how quickly my life and my habits had changed. I thought back to my meat eating days at university and realized those days, enjoyable as they had been, were definitely in the past.

Food Fight

McMaster University, Hamilton, October, 1977.

Dave is older than us and he has job in Oshawa. I admire him. He is fearless and daring. He could care less what anybody thinks of him. Around Dave life is exciting, fun and unpredictable.

"What are those colored blotches on the wall," asks Dave. He's visiting for the weekend and he joins Duncan and me for a meal at the main university cafeteria on Friday night.

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"They're remnants of a recent Jell-O freshness test," I explain.

"I don't understand. How does the test work?"

"It's quite simple. You throw some Jell-O against the wall. If it bounces back, which it usually does, it fails the test. Those blotches are examples of Jell-O that passed the test. They're red. That was Wednesday's."

Duncan asks, "How do you like the chicken, Dave?"

Being Friday, it was chicken. This consisted of half chickens, lathered in a greasy sauce.

"It's a bit raw, isn't it," grimaces Dave.

"That makes it exciting," I say, demonstrating. I pick a left half-chicken from Dave's plate and join it to my right half. "Chuck chuck chuck chuck. It's alive." The chicken appears to run off the table.

"Ah come on, Haines. Give me my chicken back," Dave exclaims. We settle back to the serious business of eating.

"Do they ever have food fights here?" asks Dave. To put this story into historical perspective, this is the time when the movie 'Animal House' with John Belushi is all the rage with university audiences. There is a notoriously comic scene that involves a food fight. We all love the film, in part because our next door neighbor at Woodstock Hall, Mike Miles, is the spitting image of John Belushi in the film.

"What hall do those people belong to?" asks Dave, with that curious mix of innocence and rascal in his eyes that should serve as a warning to me. He points at a group of young men two tables over.

"Matthews Hall."

Dave stands up and yells, "Matthews sucks!" He reaches down and grabs Duncan's food with his left hand and my chicken with his right and hurls it at the 'offending' table of students. Duncan and I dive to the floor for safety.

From under the table I say to Dave, "Next time do you mind waiting until I've finished my meal? I'm not that

keen on the chicken but I am a growing boy and food goes a long way."

"Sorry," he grins. "I couldn't resist throwing the mashed potatoes. They pass the fresh test."

He jumps up, tossing my potatoes at the Matthews' boys and screams, "Food fight!" The battle cry has been definitively launched. The place literally erupts into a free-for-all, transcending gender and place of residence. The immature joie de vivre of young people away from home soon takes over. We stay until Dave has thrown every bit of food he can reach, extending his reserves to the plates of some students seated across from us. They are in no position to complain, as they also retreat from the line of fire by ducking under the table.

Using our trays to protect us from flying chicken, potatoes, and pudding, we quickly exit the cafeteria, leaving the remaining participants to clean up afterwards.

Dave says, "That was fun." He has a grin that looks as if he has just had his birthday, Christmas and New Year parties all at once. Boys will be boys.

Duncan and I agree later never to invite Dave to the cafeteria again.

Dave gave me a gift. By being brave enough to be himself, he gave me permission to be unique, to tread a path that was mine alone. Thus, I could dance with my own destiny, untainted by the expectations of others, or by what I imagined the expectations of others to be.

So I took steps based on the inner nudging of my heart and on the outer experiences of my life: to stop drinking alcohol, to become a vegetarian. These decisions resulted in some ridicule, which was, fortunately, mostly of the friendly sort. I found that it took some courage to walk my own path, to dance my own dance; but to live in harmony with soul purpose and to be free can mean risking ridicule and I was prepared to do that.



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*Our own heart, and not other men's opinions,
forms our true honour.*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1772 – 1834

Summer in Paradise

Hunza, June, 1988.

The summer days were reasonably long, so it became a habit to go for a one hour walk after dinner, following the paths along the water channels that flowed between people's homes and terraced fields. Darkness would descend like a gentle mist, obfuscating almost entirely the range of vision during the return journeys along the unlit road that wound back to the village past the boys' and girls' schools, restaurants and homes of the locals. The evenings were almost always clear and still, so a few of us would drag chairs into the hotel courtyard to watch the stars and count the passing satellites. In the crystal clear mountain air it seemed like you could reach out and touch the stars.

The tiny hydro station had been completed since my previous visit to Karimabad so we now had the luxury of limited electric lighting every other night. The Nagar people across the river alternated daily with the Hunzas in using the power.

I noted that there were significantly more Western visitors than there had been the previous autumn. The pass through to China had reopened. Not long after my return I met two British men,

Tim and Mark, who had traveled by bicycle up the Indus and Hunza valleys after beginning in the plains of Delhi and Lahore. They were resting in Karimabad before embarking on their biggest challenge yet—getting up and over the Khunjerab Pass.

We shared stories and lent each other books. When they heard of my dreams of pursuing a life of self sufficiency, Tim seemed anxious to share something with me. He was the taller of the two men, with blonde wavy hair and a pleasant nature, always helpful and quick to smile. We were sitting in the courtyard looking across at the grandeur of the terraced fields set against the backdrop of Mount Rakiposhi, its mighty western ridge thrusting into the clouds. "Have you heard of Findhorn, John?" he asked.

"No, what's that?"

"It's more of a 'where' than a 'what'. It's a spiritual community in the north of Scotland that was founded by three people in the 1960s."

"I've really never heard of it. Can you tell me more?"

"It's almost legendary. For five years its founders, Peter and Eileen Caddy and Dorothy Maclean, ran the Cluny Hill Hotel, a big, old, multi-storey complex. They'd learned to follow the spiritual guidance Eileen received during meditation."

"That sounds intriguing. What kind of guidance?"

"Well, for one, they were guided to leave the hotel and move to the Findhorn Bay Caravan Park. Here these three people, together with Peter and Eileen's three young boys, parked their thirty foot caravan.

"They were unemployed with few prospects for work and no money in the bank. All six of them lived on an unemployment benefit of something like eight pounds per week. Eileen communed for two to three hours nightly with God for insight and guidance. Due to the almost total lack of privacy in their cramped living conditions, she made nocturnal sorties to the caravan park's public toilets for her guidance.

"That guidance clearly encouraged them to start a garden in far less than ideal conditions."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It's my understanding that the garden was built in a place that had previously been a bit of sand and gravel surrounded by gorse and broom.

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“Peter had a Rosicrucian background that left him with a simple philosophy: ‘Love where you are, love whom you’re with, and love what you are doing.’”

“I’m going to remember that. But what do you mean by Rosicrucian?”

“Let’s just say it’s a form of spiritual training that’s been around for centuries. Peter was a no-nonsense leader with drive who had previously guided at least one expedition in the Himalayas.”

This conversation seemed appropriate as we were nestled at the extreme western extremities of the Himalayas in a land of master gardeners who had hewn plots of abundance and beauty out of sand and rock in an unforgiving landscape. One of these gardeners was leading a cow on a rope on the path below us. A field of millet bent to the gentle alpine breeze.

“So was he the driving force behind the garden work?”

“He was definitely a leader but each of the three adults brought their own particular talents to the project. Their work of creating gardens and beauty was interspersed with times of quiet inner activity. Eileen and Dorothy wrote down the daily guidance they received. Peter tended to receive intuitive flashes of guidance, often while he was actively engaged in work.

“You’ll like this John. Dorothy Maclean is Canadian. After a couple of months of gardening their first spring, she received her first clear message from nature, from the deva for garden peas.”

“Whoa Tim. What do you mean by deva?”

“I’m no expert, but the Caddies and Dorothy Maclean knew from their earlier studies that devas are angelic-like beings responsible for the patterns and forms of nature. What I think is important to the story is that these former hoteliers had almost no gardening experience between them. They’d been reading gardening books through the winter which had contradictory advice, most of which applied to totally different gardening conditions in England’s more fertile and relatively balmy south. They were extremely grateful to receive this unexpected help and they acted upon it immediately.”

“I can certainly relate to what you’re telling me. I too have very little gardening experience.”

“Look for books on Findhorn when you get a chance, John. Even with their almost total lack of experience, Peter, Eileen and Dorothy had extraordinary success that soon became the subject of media stories, and their fame spread. They knew they were embarking on a pioneering way of working with nature that seems so important in these times in which many people have lost their connection with the natural world.”

“What kind of success did they have?”

“Their vegetables grew in ways that seemed to result from more than just hard work and sound organic practices and composting. One story I heard was that they had calculated they would be able to use eight red cabbages at an average weight of four pounds a cabbage. They didn’t count on one of their cabbages weighing thirty eight pounds and another forty two.”

“Oh, I like that. I’m going to look into this. Thanks, Tim.”

Upon hearing my stories about all of the signs pointing me to Santa Fe, New Mexico, my same British friends lent me a Shirley MacLaine book I had read many years before, *Dancing in the Light*. It was good to reread it. Amongst other things the celebrity author wrote of her adventures in New Mexico. She told of the SW Native Americans’ fascination with turquoise. I had to grin when reading this, touching the turquoise necklace Lucia had given me when we parted in Dharmasala. Shirley MacLaine also wrote of her visits to see Chris Griscom for a sort of spiritual acupuncture in Galileo, a village outside Santa Fe.

Just before leaving for their uphill biking adventure this same British pair came to say goodbye. Mark acted as the spokesperson this time. He had straight dark hair and glasses, a button nose and face darkened by the sun of many days spent on his bicycle. “We want to lighten up our loads as much as possible before this next leg of our trip. We’re giving away books and there’s one we really want you to have.” He handed me a copy of Richard Bach’s *Illusions*.

I protested, responding, “Thanks but I’ve read it many times already. Not long ago I gave away my last copy. Perhaps you should give it to someone else.”

“We really think you should have it,” was his immediate reply.

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“OK. If you insist.” I gave in. I set the thin paperback with its distinctive black cover on the window sill with my other books, promising myself to look at it in about a month’s time.

A Bowl of Cherries

The poplar leaves made the softest chiming flutter in the breeze flowing down off the flank of the nearest peak. The dew would soon be but a memory as the sun’s morning rays pierced the thin mountain air. The first of the day’s minibuses pulled in from Gilgit and out climbed a large and familiar figure. It was Rick, the soft-spoken American I had befriended on the Delhi-Lahore bus the month before. A good six foot four, with glasses framing his shining eyes, he was every bit the gentle giant. He claimed one of the three beds in the ‘dorm’ room in my hotel. We spent a lot of time together and he often joined me for the pleasant after dinner walks and the stargazing that followed. We shared our stories and our aspirations. I spoke to Rick about how I had come to find travelling so much more rewarding when I lingered longer in the places that touched me. I no longer yearned to see everything and experience nothing. Was I shedding that aspect of societal conditioning that rewarded the visually attractive form of youth? Advertising uses images of the young and the beautiful to convince us to accumulate more and more stuff. In doing so do we amass layers of residue that separate us from our pristine essence? The towering, ancient, rugged, craggy, heart-stirring Karakorum monoliths surrounding me mirrored the profound beauty of the lean and wrinkled centenarians still walking in their shadows. Were these barren rocky giants serving to strip me bare and leave me naked, pure and vulnerable, like a new-born child? Is this why I had come to the mountains and to this alpine desert in particular? Is this why Jesus spent forty days fasting in the desert? Is this why spiritual aspirants over the ages have headed to the mountains, drawn like bees to honey, seeking the nectar of the gods? So many travelers race from one superficial visit to the next, accumulating destinations like baseball cards, rather than deeply experiencing them. I realized that I was no longer part of the ‘I’ve been to Bali,

too' crowd. This was a backwards journey now, back to the roots of existence, from the superficial to the sublime, from the conditioned and the tainted to the Absolute and the pure.

Rick had been on the road for a long time and was beginning to question the meaning of the ceaseless travel he had undertaken. Together, we enjoyed eating the Hunza fruits of the season. Incredible local cherries had finished the week before, but now Rick and I tasted the most exquisite dark mulberries during a long afternoon walk. Apricots were beginning to ripen and grapes and apples would soon follow.

One morning Rick and I talked about fate and the seeming coincidences that, when followed in faith, lead us from one pertinent adventure to the next. I spoke of all the signs pointing me to New Mexico. Just the day before I was writing a letter to Lucia in Holland and I noticed for the first time the address that Bill had written in my address book during our auspicious meeting in the restaurant in Kathmandu: *Rancho Allegre Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico*. At that time Bill spoke of living in an amazing place in the American South West, but I had not noted then just where that place was.

I expounded to Rick on my theory that these guiding coincidences seem to happen when we quite spontaneously choose to do something outside our normal routine.

At the end of our hours long discussion Rick was still skeptical about all this 'New Age' theorizing. I asked him what he would like to do.

Rick thought for a moment and then said, "How about a little walk?"

"Sure," I replied. After all that sitting and talking a walk seemed a splendid idea.

"And what I'd really like," Rick continued, "is some cherries. It's too bad they're no longer available."

"Let's go see," I said with a twinkle in my eye.

We set off at a good pace and were soon beyond the village on a trail leading between terraced paddocks. Young healthy barley plants bent softly to the tickling wind. The first potatoes were blooming, little white and purple solanum buds decorating the terraces. This wasn't just a place for growing food; this was a stepped garden of beauty and delight. We were alone but not

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lonely under the midday sun. The mountains, trees, herbs and flowers kept mute company. Presumably people were enjoying lunch or a siesta away from the crescendo of the summer heat.

Suddenly a middle-aged Hunza man sprang out of nowhere with a plate in his hands. I didn't recognize him. He handed the dish to us, a big smile on his face. The white and worn porcelain plate was full of cherries! We smiled with gratitude to him, looked at each other with incredulity, and did the only thing the moment demanded—we ate the cherries, slowly savoring each luscious, perfectly ripe orb.

“Wow. That was pretty amazing,” said Rick. “I wonder if he has any more?”

“Let's go see,” I agreed. This seemed an opportunity too good to miss.

We found the man, handed him back his plate, and used creative sign language to ask if we could purchase some more cherries. Once he caught our meaning, the man stepped inside his home and soon returned with a bag filled with more of the perfect red orbs he had shared with us before. We paid for them immediately and smiled our thanks to the man. A group of shy children watched our transaction from the safety of a nearby stone wall. We returned nonchalantly to our hotel, each lost in thought over the magic of the simple event that had just occurred.

Counter Clockwise for a Change

That evening, after Rick and I had feasted at our hotel's restaurant we looked at each other and simultaneously said, “Why don't we go in the opposite direction for our walk this evening. We can go through the village first and then return along the water channel. Perhaps the fruit and vegetable stall in town will be open.” We both had cherries on our minds. Karimabad had only one fruit and vegetable shop and it was usually closed. Those of us staying in the Hunza for more than a few days periodically journeyed to Gilgit for fresh produce. This was a self sufficient community that didn't necessarily grow a surplus for the visitors who were beginning to arrive now that the road had improved. Still, it

seemed more than a coincidence that Rick and I each had this idea simultaneously, so we set off for town first, beginning our counter clockwise circumambulation.

Sure enough, the veggie stall was closed. Neither of us was surprised. We continued along the main road and within a couple of minutes we encountered a young man whom Rick had met earlier in the day.

"Where are you guys going?" he asked. I recognized his American accent.

"Just for a walk, Jason," replied Rick in his usual friendly tone.

"Mind if I join you?"

"Not at all," I responded. It always felt good to share some of the lesser known paths and walks with visitors.

We carried on through the village on the road that neatly bisected the shops and houses. Dusk was upon us but it was still easily light enough to see the way. Within minutes a Western woman walked towards us. She immediately recognized Jason and excitedly exclaimed to him, "How are you doing?"

"Great, Sandra," he replied. "You can't help but enjoy a place like this."

It turned out that they had met the previous week in Kashgar. She asked if she could join us and we all responded affirmatively. Rick happened to mention to her about my plans to go to Santa Fe in New Mexico, perhaps to study Chinese medicine.

"You may not believe this," Sandra said. "But I've just graduated from one of the Chinese medical schools in Santa Fe! I've been in China to observe, assist and learn from experienced Chinese doctors and to gain practical experience."

For the remaining forty minutes of our walk Rick caught up with Jason and I gleaned useful information about Santa Fe and Chinese medical studies from our new friend. It was dark when we returned to our respective hotels. Rick and I settled into chairs for our nightly stargazing session.

"That was quite a day," said Rick in his dry, laconic Mid-Western manner. "I now have no doubt that you will indeed be going to Santa Fe."

"Did you see that when we acted spontaneously out of our ordinary routine by going in the opposite direction for our walk that the coincidences happened?" I asked.

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"Sure did," replied Rick. "If we had gone in our usual direction we wouldn't have bumped into Jason. It was too bad about the fruit and vegetable stall being closed, though."

"That would have been icing on the cake." I laughed. "You can see that thinking of the veggie stall was important because it got us to act out of our established routine. If we hadn't seen Jason we in turn would not have met Sandra. We would probably just have said hello to her as we passed."

"Yes. Really." Rick warmed up to the discussion. "What are the chances in this remote place of meeting someone from one of the two schools you are considering attending? You heard what she said. These are little schools. She was one of only fourteen graduates this past year. And to think this chain of events would happen the very day that we discussed coincidences and Santa Fe. It's more than a little uncanny, John."

"There are no coincidences, Rick," I stated.

"I'm beginning to believe that, John. Hey, what do you think you will find in Santa Fe?"

"Time will tell," I responded, continuing to gaze contentedly at the crystalline firmament above us. "Time will tell. There is one thing I wonder about, Rick."

"What is that?"

"I wonder if they grow cherries in New Mexico."

John P. Haines



30

One day, when Buddha was delivering a sermon, he merely held up a flower and said nothing. All his disciples were baffled except one named Mahakasyapa, who smiled, showing that he understood the meaning of Buddha's gesture. This, according to an ancient legend, was the beginning of Zen.

Dr. Gary D. Guthrie, *The Wisdom Tree*¹

Mountain Retreat

“Hey Alex,” I called. “Where can I go for a few days where I can be completely alone?”

Rick had moved on to Kashgar with the intent of making an attempt at entering Tibet. Karimabad was hardly crawling with tourists, but I felt the urge to sleep under the stars and commune more closely with nature. Alex had recently lent me some of his Zen books and I had been captivated and inspired by them. Perhaps their message of simplicity had triggered this desire for solitude.

I handed Alex's books back to him. He was dressed in a long sleeved navy cotton shirt, a vest and yet another of his ever-present colorful scarves. Alex certainly had a unique fashion sense. He was almost a throwback to the earlier days of European mountain guides.

1. Guthrie, Dr. Gary D. 1997, *The Wisdom Tree*, Ocean Tree Books, Santa Fe, NM. With kind permission of the publisher.

"Did the books foster this sudden interest in solitude, John?" Alex's question was uncannily perceptive.

"I suppose they did. What does Zen mean to you, Alex?"

"For some Zen is a religion. For me, it's a way of life. For others it's almost an art form. It's the stories that teach me so much. That's why I bring these books to the mountains."

"You mean like the story of the two monks who find the beautiful young woman in a long kimono trying to cross the stream?"

"Yes, that one. Don't you love it? The first monk carries her across the stream and gently sets her down on the other side. Leaving her safely there, the two monks walk further. But the second monk grows increasingly agitated. When he finally confronts the first monk by saying that they're not supposed to make contact with women, the first monk makes what I call a very Zen-like comment."

"You mean where he says something like, 'You're still carrying her in your mind. I left her back at the water's edge?'"

"That's it. A story like that can be read over and over. It has been said that if you have Zen in your life, you have no doubts and no fears, no unnecessary cravings and no extreme emotions. You serve humanity humbly, fulfilling your presence in this world with loving kindness and observing your passing as a petal falling from a flower."

"It sounds simple, Alex. Is it?"

"I suppose so. Like the monk, we need to stay in the moment, in the present. The Hunzas do this naturally. They don't need any books. But for us a little solitude can help. I often sleep alone in the mountains when I don't have clients."

"I certainly don't have clients, Alex." We laugh. "Where would you suggest I go to sleep alone in the mountains?"

"I have to go to see the headman of a little village north of here the day after tomorrow. I am going there to get some porters for the clients who are due to arrive soon. This couple wants to do quite an extended trek in the mountains so I will need some help.

"Would you like to join me? We can sleep at the headman's house and then you can head up to the meadows above the village for a few days to hang out and explore. I'll come back here after the first night. You could return to the village when you are ready

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and then make your way back to the Karakorum Highway. If you time it right you could then catch a minibus back here.”

“Sounds good,” I replied. I trusted and respected Alex greatly. I was sure that his suggestion would be a good one. The next day I procured enough dried fruit, nuts, vegetables and bread to see me through my quest; a quest that I hoped would help me to empty my cup a little more of accumulated beliefs and conditioning.

Alex had arranged for a lift in one of the village jeeps so it took only a bumpy hour to reach our destination. Alex introduced me to the headman who kindly offered his flat roof for us to sleep on. After a simple meal of dried fruit and nuts, Alex and I rolled out our sleeping bags onto the rooftop. Electricity had not reached this village and the moon was not yet visible so it was reasonably dark. Only the stars cast their glittering glow on our night time abode.

“John. There is something I would like to share with you,” Alex said, sounding a little hesitant.

“Sure. Go ahead,” I answered, curious.

“You’re not like the other travelers I see that come here. You stay with a different intention, it would seem,” Alex went on.

“That’s probably true, Alex. I love this place and these people. I just want to understand it all and myself a little better.”

His nod was barely perceptible in the pitch-dark of the rooftop.

“I’m concerned,” he continued. “As you know I’ve been coming here for five years and I’ve always been so impressed with the tremendous respect the Hunzas have for nature. They truly acknowledge the spirit of nature in everything they do.”

He paused.

“You know that place with the three trees beside the stream on the way up to the upper meadow at the base of Altit Peak?”

“Yes,” I replied. I knew the place well. I frequently rested there in the shade of one of those trees after the steep and strenuous climb up from Karimabad. It was an enchanting spot to read, write, or meditate. There was a little patch of grass on which I often spread my Balinese blanket before settling down for a picnic. A shepherd occasionally passed by, but otherwise I usually had this natural, open air temple to myself. The mountain walls rose steep and cliff-like on both sides, creating a sort of highland

cathedral. The glacial stream, which later fed the water channels of three Hunza villages, whispered and sang its sweet melodies as it tumbled over giant boulders on its gravity-driven plunge. This little glade lay adjacent to the path leading up to a summer meadow. Rick and I had hiked to this remote meadow the previous week. Two shepherds had invited us in to their hut. We had joined them in the dim interior of their rustic abode, half buried between the giant boulders of a glacial moraine. They shared with us some of their fermented yoghurt-like drink while one of them steadily churned more milk in an animal bladder.

"As I've told you before, these mountains are really an alpine desert," Alex's words interrupted my musings. He continued, "In such an environment every tree is important. And nearly every tree has been planted with painstaking attention by generations of local people.

"With the sudden increase in the number of visitors since the completion of the Karakorum Highway has come a transformation in the valley, especially in Karimabad. It's the only Hunza village that most tourists visit. More guest houses and restaurants have been built which has increased the demand for wood for fuel.

"Through the planting of quick growing species such as poplars the Hunzas have been able to generate enough wood for fuel and building for centuries."

Alex's words caused me to reflect on the construction of a house I had observed in Altit the previous week. The walls were constructed of stacked rocks that were later sealed with a mud plaster. Whole peeled poplar beams supported the roof.

Alex continued his story, "But now gas and kerosene are used for cooking in some houses and restaurants and wood is being brought up from Gilgit and beyond.

"A couple of days ago I was shocked to see that one of those three willows beside the stream had been cut down, probably for fuel. A few years ago this would never have happened. But contact with tourists and with other Pakistanis from further south seems to have detrimentally influenced some of the younger Hunza men.

"I went and spoke with some of the village elders yesterday because I'm pretty sure I know who did this," Alex persisted, somewhat passionately. He had my full attention even though I

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could see little more than a vague outline of him in the gloom. His voice was more than adequate in purveying the gravity of his words and emotion. "But the elders didn't feel there was anything they can do without any real evidence."

Alex's voice softened, "I've got a bad feeling about this. I'm concerned that the nature spirits are going to retaliate."

"What do you mean, Alex?" I asked, a little perplexed.

"Well you know from what you've heard of Findhorn in Scotland that some people can very clearly and intentionally communicate with devas and nature spirits. These are the architects and builders of form. The Hunzas have been taught by and worked with Nature in this way for a very long time. How else could they have created such a paradise in an otherwise forbidding land?" Alex's voice cracked with obvious concern.

"And now one of the Hunzas has betrayed Nature by cutting this tree. This is an unprecedented incident. I have a very uneasy feeling about this," Alex finished.

There wasn't much for me to say. We rested in silence for a few minutes, lost in thought. I sensed that Alex felt better having got this off his chest. I, however, now also felt concern. Why is it that this thing we so often hear called progress has so many subtle but noticeable negative implications? I was a visitor to this paradise. I ate meals in the local restaurants and read by the light of kerosene lamps. I was also responsible for the development that was so swiftly altering a precious way of life and people.

Alex spoke a little about the upcoming trek he was soon to guide and then fell fast asleep under the faint starlight. I lay awake for awhile until the pristine mountain air lured me into a deep slumber.

The following morning Alex left to find some porters and I walked into the high meadows above the village. I found a reasonably horizontal spot near a stream and put down my gear before meandering off on a restful reconnoiter of the area. My thoughts repeatedly returned to Alex's words of the previous night.

The next days were spent simply enjoying the mountains and my solitude. I did not wander far. One day a couple of village children watched me from a distance, curious about this stranger sleeping outside above their village. I didn't cook. I subsisted

comfortably enough on the raw rations and bread I had brought with me. My thirst was sated by the nearby stream. This was a desolate, rocky and steep landscape. Aside from the brief visit of the children I was quite alone. I didn't see any animals save for a few small rodents, long-tail marmots, I believe, and birds. The snow leopard, the elusive big cat of the central Asian mountains, remained elusive. Just as well.

After some days I was ready to return to my little hotel room in Karimabad, so I hiked back to the village before making the precipitous descent to the valley floor where the Karakoram Highway roughly paralleled the river. I didn't need to wait long to catch a ride back to the village that straddled the river below Karimabad. From there I enjoyed the steep, familiar climb up to my hotel. I was joined by a couple of travelers who came off the same minibus. I helped one of them, a small Dutch woman, carry her heavy backpack up the sinuous track. It wasn't difficult to see why the Hunzas are so lean. One couldn't go far in this environment without making a strenuous climb. These two travelers had just arrived in the Hunza for the first time, coming from Kashgar over the Khunjerab Pass. They accompanied me to my hotel, where I helped them get rooms.

Electric Mountain

Because I had by now spent so much time in the Hunza, word soon got around that I was the person to ask about local information, especially concerning the plethora of walks that were possible in the area. I often guided visitors on hikes. Rick and I had enjoyed a couple of particularly long treks, in one case sleeping on the mountainside high above the village before returning the next day.

Marja, the young Dutch woman I had helped out the previous day on the climb up from the river, after hearing of my overnight hike with Rick, asked me if I would take her up into the mountains for an overnight stop. She was intrigued by my enthusiasm about the Hunza and wanted to experience the locality 'closer to the earth'. I agreed to help her.

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We had an early evening meal at the hotel restaurant, purchased a package of biscuits for a treat, and then headed off with only backpacks, sleeping bags and sleeping mats. The place I had in mind was an hour's steep climb away. We crossed over the stream that tumbled down from the shepherds' hut and followed a narrow, twisting trail up to a small leveled-off area just above the highest terraces over Altit. There was one small tree under which we rolled out our sleeping bags and mats. This was one of my favorite spots. I often sat in the shade of this willow during the day and occasionally met farmers working nearby plots or small teams of men who maintained the water channels. These people would join me under the tree for a brief respite from their labors.

It was soon dark and we delighted in the arrival of the night sky. Despite being only an hour's walk above the village the stars seemed even closer than from down below. We could discern a few faint, flickering lights far below in the village of Altit. Karimabad was hidden from view but the back of Baltit Fort could be seen, balanced on its imposing hilltop reigning over both villages. The portion of the cliffside channel carrying precious water to these villages and adjoining farms was across the same ravine that contained the recently felled willow Alex had spoken of. Aside from the muffled rumble of a distant stream all was silent.

I opened up my backpack to get out the package of biscuits. Ever since my days of tramping in the rain in New Zealand I had carried a pack liner that looked for all the world like an oversized, thick orange garbage bag. Everything I wanted to keep absolutely dry went into this pack liner. Now, as I extracted the biscuit package from my bag, every piece of plastic I contacted turned a luminescent green. The same glowing light materialized when I tore open the plastic packaging containing the biscuits. We were astonished.

I experimented by running the tips of my fingers along the pack liner. Green tracks of light momentarily appeared and then faded away. By now it was completely dark and moonless so the eerie green lines were all that we could see. I was fascinated and curious. Marja was equally fascinated and a little nervous. We snacked on biscuits.

Marja asked, "What do you think the cause of the green light is?"

"I don't know. I have never seen anything like it," I replied. "Perhaps it's a visible form of static electricity," I speculated further. I felt positively excited. I wondered if something mystical was happening.

And then, as if to add to the mystery of this already unusual night, an immense beam of white light suddenly burst soundlessly from the mountainside far above us. It was as if some giant was shining his gigantic flashlight from his cave home in the mountain. I was bedazzled and so was Marja.

"What's that?" I asked, barely above a whisper.

"Don't ask me," blurted Marja, in an awed and slightly strained tone.

"I'm sure there is nothing to be afraid of," I reassured her. "After all it's only a huge beam of light." If I felt excited before, I was absolutely exhilarated now. It was as if an unknown part of our world had quite suddenly and unexpectedly been revealed to us and I rejoiced in the newness of it. To me, there was nothing threatening about these lights. In my eyes, they were simply fascinating. I felt like a country boy seeing the lights of the city for the first time. Only these lights were in the country. There seemed no logical reason for their existence, but seeing is believing.

I stared up at the light, transfixed, wracking my brains for an explanation for this phenomenon, when the beam vanished, as suddenly as it had appeared.

Marja was clearly unsettled. She spent a few minutes talking about her upbringing and then about the help she had received in recent years from a hypnotist. He had helped her to see how she had legitimately developed certain behaviors in response to perceived threats in her childhood. With these threats losing their relevance as she entered adulthood, the behaviors were no longer necessary, but they persisted, having become unconscious habits. Over a period of time she grew to really trust this man. He was able to take her, through hypnosis, back to the original events. She was then in a position to understand the behaviors and, subsequently, let them go. This, in turn, led to her present ability to be more free to make fresh choices like this trip that brought

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her, with me, to this remote, peaceful place. I wondered how much behavior I had that was no longer relevant. We are all conditioned by our experiences. How many of our reactions are automatic and how many are truly conscious and come only from what is happening in the present moment?

The night grew cooler. It was time for bed. We crawled into our respective sleeping bags under the willow tree. I was soon immersed in a deep and dreamless sleep.

The morning sun caressed my cheek and I opened my eyes. Marja lay cocooned in her sleeping bag, looking at me.

"How did you sleep?" I asked.

"Not very well," she responded, grumbling a little. "I couldn't get to sleep for hours. There was a woman singing up there," she said, pointing to the rock strewn slope above us. It was a bit hard to imagine someone choosing to sit out there for a midnight carol.

A funny thought struck me. "She wasn't yodeling, was she?" I asked.

Marja failed to see the humor in this and gave me a biting stare. "All I know is that the voice was definitely not coming from the village. There weren't even any lights down there. I was frightened and I didn't sleep much."

I felt for Marja. She was obviously tired and distraught. It was probably a case of too many new sensory experiences at once. She would need time to digest them. I have to say that I was still buzzing from the events of the previous night but I was a wee bit disappointed in having missed the night time song. I looked down the valley towards Mount Rakiposhi. Its enormous glacial face was bathed in a gorgeous golden light. *What a magnificent way to start the day*, I thought.

Suddenly, Marja sat up. "I think it's going to rain," she exclaimed.

"I doubt it. It never rains here," I replied. In all my months in the Hunza I had never experienced rain.

"But look!" she motioned towards Rakiposhi in the south-west.

Sure enough, an angry, gray, swirling mass of thunder clouds emerged through a cleft in the mountains to the west. As we watched, this hell-bent tempest surged towards us. We sat stunned, glued to the spot. It happened so fast that we didn't even

think of rolling up our sleeping bags and stuffing them into our rucksacks. In almost no time we were engulfed in a raging thunderstorm. Instantly we and our sleeping bags were drenched. We huddled together under the tree, our only meager protection. We were rocked with a resounding crack. Thor himself must have been involved in this frenzy. The sky lit up and we looked up in time to see a jagged fork of lightning pierce the water channel where it hugged the cliffside opposite us. The water channel immediately exploded at this point of impact and its contents plummeted down the vertical flank, adding to the rapidly swelling stream below.

“That’s Karimabad and Altit’s water supply!” I cried, my voice barely audible above the surrounding din. I immediately thought of Alex’s recent warning. It looked like Nature’s retribution was indeed upon these humble villagers.

The rain continued to lash down and rivulets of streaming water appeared in every cleft on the impermeable hillside.

“We’d better leave immediately for the village while the stream remains crossable,” I called to Marja.

“Good idea,” she yelled in response. “I don’t want to stay here.” She grabbed her pack and got started, needing no further encouragement. I grabbed my bag and reached down to pick up our sleeping bags. I hesitated. For some inexplicable reason I felt compelled to leave the saturated bags where they were. I wiped rain from my eyes and hurried to catch up with Marja. The stream was just crossable, with the surging white water lapping at the rustic bridge. Making our way carefully over, we passed a small group of Hunza men with picks and shovels headed up the ravine, presumably to survey the damage. The last part of the walk to the village was straightforward enough, so I let my thoughts range back to the chain of events leading up to this storm. I found it more than coincidental that Alex had expressed his concerns to me about the tree being cut just days before, and that we chose to be in the only place where it was possible to see the lightning strike the water channel. The point of impact wouldn’t have been visible to people in the nearest villages and it was too early in the day for anyone to be attending to their gardens in the area where we had slept.

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Back at the hotel we changed into dry clothes and warmed up with cups of tea. It was still raining but the full force of the storm had dissolved, as if its purpose had been fulfilled. We sat sheltered under the cover of the veranda, explaining to other travelers what had transpired. I would have liked to speak with Alex but he was off trekking with his clients and wasn't due back for two weeks. The town's water supply had dried up and Mansour told me he didn't recall this ever happening before.

By midday the rain had completely stopped and the sun was attempting to break through the lingering clouds. It was far more humid than I had ever encountered in the valley. There was a strange opaque quality to the atmosphere. It almost felt sad and the melancholy was affecting me.

Late in the afternoon Karimabad was still without water. I decided, somewhat reluctantly, to retrieve the sleeping bags Marja and I had earlier abandoned. Hopefully the sun had done its best to dry them. I decided out of curiosity to go via Altit to see what effect the storm had had there, before looping up to our previous night's sleeping location. I soon found that I couldn't reach Altit because the main bridge had been knocked out by the flooded stream. Men were already industriously attempting to rebuild it. I scampered upwards adjacent to the stream, searching in vain for a place to cross. The little bridge we had earlier used was also gone and the swollen stream acted as a barrier. I finally managed to traverse the watercourse just above the place where the broken water channel was dropping its load of water into the turbulent current. There would be no way for the local men to repair the broken cliffside sluice until they found a way to temporarily divert its flow somewhere higher up, perhaps near where the willow had been slashed down. There the stream and the water channel flowed close to each other.

I clambered up the last portion of the trail, ready for a break after my long and circuitous route. In total, the climb had taken more than one-and-a-half hours. The largest branch of the willow tree, directly over our outstretched sleeping bags, had snapped and now lay on the ground, covering the crumpled sacks. I managed to drag the bags out from under the branch. They were still saturated. Ordinarily I would have sat and rested for a spell before returning to the village. Not this time. There was a very unfriendly, almost

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hostile, feeling about the place. I rolled up my cargo, stuffed it in my backpack, and immediately departed. What was Nature saying?



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Learning to Breathe

As a boy and, in fact, all through my growing up years, I had suffered from hay fever and I was almost always congested. Suffering might be too strong a word. I had long ago accepted that I often had a runny nose and it was quite normal for me to periodically blow my nose. Because of this nearly continuous nasal congestion I had developed the habit of mouth breathing. I didn't remember ever breathing through my nose. Some people wouldn't leave home without a certain well known credit card. I daren't leave home without my pocket handkerchief.

In one of the Lobsang Rampa books I had read while crossing China, the author wrote of the importance of nose breathing. Lucia had also spoken of this with me in Mcleod Ganj.

In the course of my high school athletic training I developed my abdominal muscles through a morning regime that included sit-ups. I also did weight training. I was proud of my well developed physique. All of these muscles were strong but they weren't necessarily flexible. My tummy, in particular, would not expand very far when I breathed in.

Lucia had also stressed the importance of breathing deeply, calmly and slowly. Further studies corroborated her suggestions. I read that the Taoists say there is a place near the navel called the tan tien. Here, energy absorbed through deep belly breathing is pooled. This reservoir of energy is then available for appropriate creative expression. It would seem that the slow, deliberate and rhythmic intake of air and energy has far reaching effects including the leveling of emotions. In addition, it contributes to health and longevity. One analogy is roughly as follows:

A dog breathes thirty-five times a minute and lives fourteen years.

A horse breathes twenty-five times a minute and lives twenty-five years.

An elephant breathes eight times a minute and lives one hundred years.

A tortoise breathes five times a minute and lives two hundred years.

Some snakes breathe once a minute and live five hundred years.

I was determined to use my time in the Hunza to intentionally retrain myself in the art and science of breathing. What better place than this with its pristine alpine air to pursue this new initiative? In the beginning I found that I kept switching back to mouth breathing, especially when laboring up steep trails. Gradually I noticed improvement. The observation of each small gain strengthened my resolve to carry on with the development of better breathing habits.

The ancient rishis noted that every ninety minutes the dominant nostril changes and they used these cycles as a guide to choose when they would eat, meditate, sleep and even defecate. For me this kind of technical study of breathing would have to wait. At this stage I was content to be regularly breathing through my nose for the first time in my life.

Earthquake

I had spent so many early evenings watching the magic play of sunlight on Golden Peak that I thought it was time to get a closer look. I joined three other travelers for the minibus ride to a primitive guest house situated next to the terminal point of a twenty-two kilometer long glacier, part of which was also visible from Karimabad. We spent an afternoon walking over a strange rock strewn landscape that had been created by the peregrinations of the glacier's leading edge. A plethora of rivulets emerged from beneath the ice and eventually merged with the Hunza River.

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Later in the day we were joined by other visitors at a cluster of very basic outdoor tables for a meal. The glacier crawled along beside us and Golden Peak loomed huge behind us like a colossal gold sheathed Buddha. As we sat gazing down the valley towards the now familiar Altit Fort and the twin villages of Altit and Karimabad, the tables and chairs quite unexpectedly began to shake and glasses crashed to the ground. It was an earthquake!

Instantly a series of avalanches appeared high in the mountains around us. The initial tremors soon stopped and, aside from the inconvenience of some broken glass, we were unharmed. I thought of Alex and hoped that he and his trekking party were not trapped under an avalanche.

Of Ghosts and Glaciers

The next day I returned to Karimabad. Alex had lent me some topographical maps and I was intrigued by the area behind the peaks that supplied the village's water. Rick and I had hiked along a boulder strewn streambed to a massive glacier there one day. We had returned along what appeared to be a recently built water channel bringing water from that massive glacier to the new hydro power station serving Karimabad and Nagar. The top of the steep tube through which the water in the channel was funneled was situated on the mountainside above a village that sat astride the Karakorum Highway one-and-a-half hours' walk southwest of Karimabad. Rick and I had been amazed at the skilled engineering required to create the tunnels and troughs of the water channel. There was an excellent walking trail paralleling the water channel as it hugged the cliffside and tunneled through the solid rock of the mountain. Alex had mentioned that I could stay at the hut sitting in the middle of a 3,500 meter high meadow accessible by a path used only by shepherds and their animals.

I decided to go. It would be a six hour uphill journey to the shepherd's hut. Aside from the traverse of an unstable slope of scree, it was not a difficult hike. The last few hours of the walk followed the huge glacier Rick and I had discovered. This river of ice cracked and growled and sang constantly. At mid-afternoon I

passed the shepherd who was carefully leading two cows over the track, presumably on their way out to the village.

Late in the afternoon, a little tired but exhilarated by the fresh air and exercise in such a magnificent setting, I arrived at a lush green meadow dotted with cows. I felt as though I had never been in a place of such raw and exquisite splendor. A horseshoe of steep glaciers all converged in one spot—the beginning of this river of ice I had come to know during my afternoon walk. I counted these tributary glaciers; there were eleven in all. What an astonishingly beautiful place and I had it all to myself, or so I thought. I sat on a smooth boulder protruding from the grass and nibbled on my evening meal. With every bite I mentally gave thanks for the opportunity to be in such an astonishing place. My heart sang. Does the outer beauty of nature remind us of our own inner beauty? The colors were simple; the forms eccentric and all was exaggerated by the acute angle of the dipping sun—silver jagged mountains, white ice and an emerald green meadow. The sounds were pure and penetrating—the groaning of the glacier and the braying of the cows. As soon as the sun disappeared it was obvious I was at a reasonably high altitude. It cooled off very quickly and I sought warmth in the shepherd's hut. The cows were already huddled snugly together against the outside wall under a lean-to roof. It was a simple dirt floor shelter with a single, small, square unglazed window looking out onto the glaciers. What the hut lacked in comfort was made up for by the view. I shuttered the window and bolted the door to keep in what little warmth there was. There was no chimney so I decided against lighting a fire. I crawled into my sleeping bag. It was pitch black. I could easily hear the breathing of the shuffling cows through the rough stone wall that separated them from me. After my long walk I was ready for sleep.

I suddenly sensed an unpleasant, malevolent presence. What could this be? The door and window were securely bolted; the shepherd would be back in the village by now. It was only me and the cows, or so I thought.

A strong hand grabbed my ankle. I don't think I've ever been so frightened.

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“Go away. I don’t want you here,” I yelled. I felt so panic-stricken that I couldn’t begin to rationally analyze what was happening. I kicked my foot to release the grip. I covered my head with my arms. It was like my worst nightmare; only I hadn’t even fallen asleep yet.

The hand released its grip on my ankle, but I still felt an evil presence in the hut.

“Go away. You’re not welcome here,” I screamed.

My heart pounded. I was definitely not breathing long and deeply like the yogis recommended. I lay dead still with my head covered by my arms for an indeterminate period. Eventually I began to relax enough to notice that the presence seemed to have left. I could again hear the cows rubbing up against the outside wall. It was a small comfort to have some company; even if only in the form of cows.

It was a long time before I finally fell asleep, out of exhaustion from the long hike and the nervous excitement. I can’t say it was a deep and peaceful slumber.

When I woke there were slivers of light shining through the cracks around the door and the shutter of the window. I opened the door, happy to let in some light. As usual there wasn’t a cloud in the sky. The cows were again spread out over the meadow, grazing, seemingly oblivious to my nearness. I looked around the outer walls of the hut. There were no signs that anything unusual had happened the night before. It was a peaceful, pastoral mountain scene.

I picked at my breakfast, having little appetite. I wrote in my journal. My original plan was to stay for a few nights and explore the surrounding wilderness. But now all I wanted to do was leave, preferably as soon as possible. I was not interested in another encounter like the one I’d had the previous night.

I packed up and left the hut as I’d found it. Returning along the river of ice with its cacophony of cracks and groans, I again felt light, as the oppressive feeling I’d woken with dissipated. I focused on my breathing, and by late morning I was on the trail beside the new water channel. I felt relieved and alive, happy to be on familiar ground. Around noon I stopped for some food. After a few minutes I was startled to see another man with a backpack approaching from the direction of the river of ice.

"Hi. I thought I was the only one back here," I said in welcome.

"Hello," he replied, smiling and nonplussed, as if it was perfectly normal that he should meet me in this relatively remote location. "I've been part of a Polish expedition climbing some peaks back there." He pointed in the direction from whence we each had come.

"Where exactly do you mean?" I asked.

"If you follow that big glacier to the left at the junction and then follow another glacier west, you would find the rest of the expedition," he stated. Rick and I had walked in that direction on our previous visit to this spot so I knew roughly where he meant. "Are you heading that way?"

"No," I replied. "I'm heading out to the valley as well."

I picked up my pack and we walked together.

"Are you Canadian, by any chance?" I asked, detecting a familiar accent.

"Yes," he said. "I'm from Calgary. I'm nineteen and I've been climbing since I was a boy. I joined this expedition of Polish climbers because it was the only way for me to get a permit to climb here. Some peaks have waiting lists years long. A few days ago I became the youngest person ever to solo a 7,000 meter peak."

"Congratulations," I said. I admired the resolve and maturity of this teenager.

"Thanks. But, frankly, my personal triumph has been overshadowed by what happened yesterday. Two of the Polish climbers, one a man in his fifties, died attempting to reach a summit they didn't have the necessary fitness for."

"That's terrible," I commiserated.

"Yes," he went on. "This was an ill-prepared expedition. I'm on my way out to find a doctor for another climber who fell."

We walked in silence for a few minutes. I then told him of the night when Marja and I had seen lights coming out of Altit Peak.

"That's interesting," he said. "We saw lights like you described beaming out of Mount Rakiposhi one night."

He went on to tell me of his home in Alberta and of his present desire to return to his family there. He had obviously been touched deeply by his experiences on this expedition. He longed

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for time in a safe and familiar home environment in order to integrate all his new impressions.

It was a very steep descent from the top of the hydro tubes down to the village by the river. When we reached the road in the village I said goodbye to my young Canadian friend. He jumped onto a minibus heading for Gilgit. There he would hopefully find a doctor. There were none in the Hunza, as far as I knew. Was this a testament to the health and independence of these special mountain people?

I sat down at a table outside a small local restaurant. A slim, elderly, silver haired Hunza man approached me and said in excellent English, "Hello. May I join you?"

"Yes. Of course," I replied, a little surprised.

This sort of up-front approach is quite unusual in the Hunza. As multilingual as these people are, very few of the older people speak English. Over a cup of tea we talked. I got the impression that this man was simply very friendly, had all the time in the world and wanted to exercise his already excellent English. I told him of my experience in the shepherd's hut.

"Do you know what may have happened up there?" I asked.

"Yes," he responded matter of factly. "Six hundred years ago there were two villages in the place where the shepherd's cabin is today. The grass covered a much bigger area then. The people in these two villages developed a, how do you say it, rivalry."

I listened intently. I could hardly believe my luck. It was almost as if this man had come along just to inform me.

He continued, "This rivalry turned bad. The men of one village killed all of the dogs of the people of the other village. The men of the other village then retaliated. They killed all of the women and children in the other village. Therefore, there are many ghosts in this place. You must have met one of these ghosts."

I looked at the small, handsome man sitting opposite me at the table. He certainly appeared to be sincere. He wanted nothing except conversation from me. He spoke of this event six hundred years before as if he was describing his own childhood, as if the memory was still fresh in his mind.

He went on, articulately, "Then the nature spirits were very angry with the people who had done this thing. So a female

glacier joined a male glacier to make the long glacier that you walked beside this morning. This changed the place and made the living area much smaller. The remaining villagers moved out from the homes that were left and created this village and others. No one lives there anymore except shepherds in the summer. The shepherds know these ghosts so this is no problem for them."

As fantastic as the story sounded, it was told with such absolute sincerity and unwavering conviction that I couldn't help but unconditionally accept it. Since this seemed to be my lucky day I thought I would push forth with a question I had wanted to ask Alex.

"So nature spirits are a familiar part of people's lives here?"

"Yes," he went on. "See that boy there?" He pointed at a boy of perhaps sixteen who was serving tea to some locals. The boy looked over with a smile.

"That boy's grandmother was a fairy."

I looked piercingly at this elderly storyteller to determine if he was having me on. His eyes indicated that he was being truthful. I continued to listen in rapt attention.

The old man continued, "When his grandfather was perhaps the age this boy is now, he joined an older shepherd as a, how do you say it, apprentice one summer in the upper meadow. There he met and fell in love with a fairy. She took on human form and they married and had two children. Then, after some years, she sadly told her husband that she must return to where she came from. She could not remain as a human any longer. She told the children, who were by then old enough to understand, that she must leave. "Look for me in the thunder and lightning," she said. Twice she appeared to them in storms. After that she was not seen or heard from again. But her descendents live today." He looked over with affection at the sixteen-year-old boy.

"Thank you so much," I said, reaching out to shake the man's hand. These simple words hardly expressed the heartfelt gratitude I felt for this angel of a man who had so elegantly shared his oral history with me. I got up, swung my backpack on, and walked back to Karimabad.

My time in the Hunza was rapidly coming to a close. I searched for and found in a tiny, dusty museum in Altit a couple

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of books on local history. In one of these books it actually said that fairies can sometimes enter sleeping villagers through their feet. There were instructions on how to prevent this including closing one's eyes. There was no mention of yelling out loud!

I continued to guide other visitors on walks. One such traveler was Carolyn, from Alaska. She joined me for several delicious salads in my room and one time we bounded up a dry streambed to a spot high above the village. Rick and I had once gone there to watch the rising of the full moon. Carolyn and I had a picnic and then we slept there under the stars. I should say that *I* slept. In the morning I woke feeling refreshed. I turned to Carolyn, who was curled up in her sleeping bag a few feet away. "How did you sleep?" I asked.

"It felt like someone was in my sleeping bag all night pulling at my feet. I hardly slept," she replied sleepily.

Illusions

Over yet another conversation-filled restaurant meal, I met an Italian traveler, Bruno. He was studying Sufism. Sufis are Islamic mystics. Through various practices such as control of breath, sound toning, sacred song and their well known ecstatic dervish dancing they attempt to embrace the divinity within themselves and all of life. Bruno, who looked every bit the mystic himself with long brown hair and beard, had reason to believe there must be a number of Sufis living in the Hunza. I assisted Bruno in his search. But every time he and I asked a local villager about the Sufis we were met with a reserved silence.

Finally, I decided to read the copy of *Illusions* that had been so deliberately handed to me by the English cyclists near the beginning of my summer in paradise. As I picked up the book I recalled fondly all the times I had shared the book with others. First I had encouraged Dean to read it when we met in Kathmandu. He loved it. Then, in New Delhi, I had lent a copy of the book to several friends. One of these new friends, David, an Australian, had been very touched by the story. At a dinner in a

pizza restaurant near Connaught Circus, walking distance from the Pahar Ganj hotels we each stayed in, David proudly confided in me that he had bought a copy of *Illusions* to give to Deidre, a friend who was leaving the next day. Our little group had called that meal our Bodhisattva Celebration. In the Buddhist tradition a Bodhisattva is one who is liberated from the seemingly endless cycles of birth and death, but who vows to remain in human form until all beings are liberated. We had joked over the meal about all being Bodhisattvas.

It was funny how just picking up the book brought back such vivid and pleasant memories. I sat down in comfort to read and opened the book. Neatly handwritten inside the front cover were the following words, "To Deidre. Love David. Delhi. February, 1988." My mouth opened in amazement. I felt a tingling sensation in my arms and hands. Now I understood why the English men had been so insistent on me having this particular book, even if they didn't consciously realize the synchronicity of their decision. And the significance of my waiting until then to open the book did not escape me. The book had gone full circle and so had my time in the Hunza. I made preparations to leave. Bruno and I would travel south together.

Alex returned from his tramping expedition, entirely safe. He described how he and his clients had been sitting at high altitude on the shoulder of Rakiposhi when the earthquake struck. "We watched an incredible series of avalanches from our safe perch. It was quite spectacular."

I told him of my adventures. When I spoke of the 'ghost' in the shepherd's hut he quite nonchalantly said, "There is a place I often take people tramping in a high valley behind Nagar. There, many years ago, a woman was raped and murdered. Her ghost is still there. I got the heebie-jeebies the first time she tried to crawl into my sleeping bag with me. Now, each time she tries, I just calmly tell her I'm not interested."

Somehow, his story put everything in perspective for me. I felt a little ashamed of the tremendous fear that had overwhelmed me that night in the shepherd's hut. Something so foreign and frightening to me was obviously more commonplace and comfortable to Alex and, presumably, the shepherd.

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“John, I’ve been thinking about Zen while I was away trekking. There’s one concept I’ve learned from Zen that I think is really important. Can I share that with you?”

“Of course.”

“It has been my experience that whatever works for me doesn’t necessarily work for someone else. That’s why I didn’t lend you the Zen books when we first met last autumn. I don’t think it’s necessary to proselytize. Each of us is capable of finding truth in our own way.”

“That reminds me of when I was on a Vipassana retreat in India in January. One woman from Israel was so enthused about her experience that she wanted to go home and tell everyone she knew about it and encourage them to do it too.”

“That’s precisely what I mean, John. There’s no doubt that Vipassana helped that woman. But it is not for everyone.”

“Maybe spiritual paths and religions are like ice cream, Alex. There are enough flavors for everyone.”

“Yes. All paths lead up the mountain.”

“That’s an appropriate one for where we are right now.”

“That’s why I said it.” We laughed.

I had come to the Hunza with the intention of gaining insight into the Hunzas’ legendary health and longevity. I left with perhaps more questions than answers.

When people ask me what the key is to the Hunzas’ health I respond, “There is no one answer. They obviously eat a home-grown organic diet that has a high percentage of raw food, fruits and vegetables prepared in simple, natural ways without any of the preservatives found in many of the supermarket ‘foods’ of today. The flour they use in bread is freshly stone ground in their small water-driven mills. They only use whole grains of wheat, barley, buckwheat or millet for that flour. The water itself is pure, highly mineralized and energized by its meandering journey from glaciers formed prior to the last ice age. The air is pristine and alpine. The people are very fit and physically active in the fulfilling of their simple, everyday chores.

“But there is something else. They are almost without exception extraordinarily happy. They accept their allotted roles in life. They care for the elderly and the mentally handicapped in

their homes. They sing and pray together, men, women, and children under one roof in their prayer houses. They respect and love one another and, with perhaps a rare exception, they are one with nature."

Perhaps my most lasting memory of the Hunzas came when I was returning from a hike to the high meadow below Altit Peak. As I neared the village I came upon a middle-aged Hunza couple taking a break from their garden work. They stood hand-in-hand gazing at the mountains—equals, content.

This, I believe, is the secret to their health and vitality.



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*For as long as space endures
And as long as living beings remain
Until then may I, too, abide
To dispel the misery of the world.*

Shantideva, 8th Century

A Telepathic Yogi

Bruno and I traveled overland to Islamabad. He shared with me some of the things he was studying. I found the connections between numbers, letters and sounds particularly interesting. The concept seemed to link in some way with Jay's suggestion to sound vowel tones to each energy center, or chakra, in the body. Bruno was coming to similar conclusions through the perspective of Islam and Sufism. Jay's ideas paralleled the teachings of the Indian and Tibetan yogis. Could East meet West through sound and song?

Bruno practiced meditation every morning. It felt comfortable to do my morning Hatha yoga asanas and meditation in a room with someone else operating in a similar way.

In Islamabad we stayed at a government-run hostel. Perhaps ten or twelve travelers slept cheek-to-jowl on the floor of one room. Early each morning, while the other travelers slept, Bruno and I executed our meditative practices. Next to us lived a family of four in a room identical to ours. The father came from San Francisco and his wife was Yugoslavian. Their eldest child, a seven-year-old boy, often came to our room and shared stories and

art with some of these young travelers. I had seen his mother and father doing yoga in their room. The man, Nico, was small and wiry of build and had long dark hair. His features were distinctly South or Central American. He approached me one day and asked, "You're doing yoga every morning, aren't you?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Is that hatha yoga?" he inquired further.

"Yes," I replied again, realizing that I wasn't being much of a conversationalist.

He looked at me with a clear, strong and gentle gaze. "I'm a yogi," he said. "I studied with a master in Morocco. He and I and some of my fellow students in other parts of the world are in telepathic contact with one another."

"How does telepathy work?" I asked.

"It is a natural extension of a regular yoga practice and is a power that can be developed, should you choose to. When the great yogi Vivekananda spoke of this at a lecture in Chicago in 1890 he was ridiculed by the scientists of the time. He explained that telepathic messages were simply done by radiations, similar to electrical waves, which were transmitted and received between individuals at a distance. This is what I do with my friends. It makes no difference how far away they are."

"Is this like radio waves?" I asked.

"Yes. Precisely." Nico continued, warming to his subject. "The scientists in Vivekananda's day said that this was nonsense and that it should have been perfectly obvious to anyone that electricity could not be transmitted without cables or wires. However, with the first use of ether transported radio waves in 1894 and the first transmission of voice on the radio in 1909, the words of the yogi were proven to be true."

"What are you doing staying in this place?" I asked.

"We've lived here for several months. It's a good place. It keeps the children and us in contact with other Westerners. This is particularly important for our eldest son since he is not going to school. There is also a good library nearby which I enjoy." He sighed. "Eventually we want to set up an Ashram somewhere in the Himalayas, perhaps in India. We'll need help with this though, since our savings are dwindling."

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This man radiated a serene confidence. I had no doubt that he and his wife, also a gentle soul, would somehow attain their goals. I found it admirable to see a young family living in such a simple, non-materialistic way.

Enlightened Mushrooms

After some days of walks together through the fascinating markets and shops of Islamabad I accompanied Bruno to the Rawalpindi bus depot. He left to travel overland through southern Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Turkey on his way back to Italy. He would continue to seek out Sufis along the way. I had enjoyed the time that Bruno and I had spent together. He had inspired me with his unstoppable quest for knowledge and understanding. I had no doubt that he too would be successful in his search. Of course, there was no way of saying where this search would take him along the way. But, ultimately he would reach the destination of the Self, of this I was sure. His intention was clear and his integrity was unimpaired.

My bus trip to Lahore was a wet one with the late summer monsoon in potent force. Much of Lahore was underwater. Life went on, largely undeterred. The bus chassis was high enough to just clear the flooded streets of the lower areas. People pushed their bicycles and occasionally attempted to ride them through the brown, grimy water. These latter attempts were hugely comical and brought much laughter from the passengers. This was not critical laughter. We all rejoiced in the hilarity of the situation. The monsoon, and the subsequent flooding, was an annual event for these people and they made the best of it. Life really did go on, especially for the children. They took it all as a game, finding creative ways to include the water in their regular pastimes. It really was a great pleasure to watch these patient, industrious people going about their business, wading, pajamas hitched up, through the turbid, watery streets.

My descent into the massive cities of teeming humanity in the Indus Valley did not seem to be disturbing. It was as if I had brought the peace and tranquility from the thinly populated land of rock and ice in the Hunza with me. Perhaps the calmness of the

mountains nurtures, in some way, the life in the cities, just as the water from the mountain tributaries brings a wealth of silt and minerals via the mighty Indus River to the farms of this vast plain.

I returned to the Salvation Army Hostel, which thankfully sat above flood level. The place was much busier than it had been the previous autumn, so I shared a room with six other travelers. Carolyn, my Alaskan friend, was there. She and I enjoyed a walk through an enormous cemetery. Many families spent their long summer evenings there tending the little gardens, praying and singing together. Strangely, or perhaps not, there was a joyful celebratory feeling to the place. I heard later that it is common for Muslims to pray to saints at their burial places. This was a dramatic contrast to the grief and sadness I was accustomed to experiencing at funerals or in cemeteries.

One morning, as usual, I was up long before dawn. I performed my ablutions, and did my yoga and meditation while the other hostel residents slept. Then I sat quietly in the pre-dawn of the garden to enjoy the sunrise. Everyone else was still sleeping. I found a bench in the small but charming enclosed garden. Precisely at the moment of sunrise two mushrooms near my feet did a decidedly un-mushroom-like movement. They bent at ninety degrees to the sun. These two small mushrooms remained bent over for perhaps one minute before smoothly returning to their normal upright position (I almost wrote 'posture'). Were they bowing to the sun and the new day? Had they done this for my benefit? Was this mushroom yoga? It seemed that once again I was having experiences that expanded my hitherto limited perception of reality.

To Pee or Not to Pee

India, August, 1988.

There was a thrill building in me at the thought of seeing Yeshi Dhonden again. First I returned to Pahar Ganj in old Delhi. I had a few days to wait for my train. I used this time to wander about the ever-fascinating streets of Delhi. I returned to my favorite

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bookstore near Connaught Circus. I picked up mail at the American Express Travel Center. I decided to simplify my clothing further. To this end I purchased loose-fitting Indian pants and shirt in thin white cotton. This was nearly all I was to wear for the next months, except for underwear of course. We are often quite attached to our clothing. I thought this would be a good practice to wear the same thing day after day, regularly hand washed. There would be no time or thought wasted deciding what would be worn on any given day. Certainly, there was the chance that I could become attached to this new outfit, as well. Or after a few months I might be happy to never see it again!

I also decided to embark on another new practice. Every Monday became a day of silence, prayer and fasting. I purchased a little notebook with pencil that I hung around my neck on these fasting days. In this way I could still communicate with others without needing to resort to speech. It was my observation that we often spend a lot of time speaking quite unconsciously out of habit. I reckoned that by resting this facility one day each week I could gain more control over my speech. The unexpected bonus of this practice was that I came to truly treasure these sacred days. I would spend much of my time alone walking meditatively in nature, listening in receptive silence to outer and inner sounds. The silence and the abstention from food seemed to fuel my creative juices. I would often spend much time writing.

Back in Dharmasala my reunion with Yeshe Dhonden was like returning to an ancient and familiar spiritual sanctuary. The man himself, however, was far from ancient. As I said before, his manner was extraordinarily childlike. He and Khalsang had recently returned from their annual sojourn in Bombay. Khalsang told me that on each of these trips Yeshe would buy a few new children's toys. He enjoyed playing with them for a time and then gave them away to some biologically young patients.

Ostensibly, aside from the diarrhea which ultimately persisted for the entire eleven months that I spent on the Indian subcontinent, I had regained excellent health. I was still very thin but my energy levels had leapt upwards. Now, however, Yeshe asked me to see him every couple of days. The routine was nearly always the same. I would sit in the crowded waiting room and breathe in the fragrance of the incense that always burned there.

Khalsang would see me and usher me in. I would then accompany Yeshe on a sojourn to an outdoor water basin in order to check a sample of urine which I brought in a tightly closed jar. We would then return through the waiting room to his office. I sat in a chair opposite while he took my pulses and looked into my eyes. Sometimes he would firmly press a couple of points on my upper back and shoulders. These points were invariably highly sensitive and I would duly grimace. He would then look at my current supply of rabbit turds, or rather pills, and he would often make a slight adjustment to the herbs I was taking three or four times a day. Yeshe would smile, say a few words which Khalsang occasionally translated and I was shepherded out of the office. After a stop at the counter to get any new herbs, I was on my way. Over time I came to greatly treasure these brief, focused visits. It felt to me as if Yeshe was silently transmitting some of the ancient timeless wisdom that permeated his being.

I once again had a room to myself in the Green Hotel. I settled into a routine of yoga, study, and walking. I visited the Tibetan Library situated halfway between the Dalai Lama's residence and the town of Dharmasala. I circumambulated the Dalai Lama's residence, which was guarded by armed Indian soldiers. During these circular tours I was often joined by Tibetan pilgrims reverently repeating their mantra, 'Om mani padme hum.' And I periodically borrowed books from the diverse collection at the Tushita Retreat Center far above the Green Hotel.

I rejoined friends I had previously met on other stops on my journey; each was pulled like filings to the magnet of this spiritual oasis for the soul. I often thought of Berham. I was still grateful for all of the support he had afforded me while on the Vipassana retreat in Bodhgaya. I still hoped to find a way to contact him in order to inform him about urine therapy.

One afternoon, spontaneously deciding to do something out of my established routine, I stopped for a cup of tea at the restaurant next to the Green Hotel. I did a double take when I walked in and saw Berham sitting at a table in the corner across from a man I didn't recognize. I approached the table enthusiastically and Berham and I exchanged a warm hug.

"Do you mind if I join you?" I asked.

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"Of course not," replied Berham, sitting down again across from the man. "This is Nicholas."

"Nice to meet you," I said, easing onto a bench next to Berham.

"Do you mind if we carry on with our conversation, John?" Berham asked me. "We were in the middle of something."

"No. Go ahead," I assented, even though I was just bursting to talk with Berham about the benefits of urine therapy, especially as it just might be beneficial for his personal health.

Berham turned again to face Nicholas. "As I was saying before we were so rudely interrupted," he winked at me, "urine is the cheapest natural therapy available. And it gives back to you the trace minerals and enzymes your body is getting rid of."

Nicholas looked at him a little dubiously and said, "But the idea of drinking my own urine appalls me."

"If you are not terribly sick your morning urine doesn't taste bad at all. Just like an ever-so-slightly warm glass of water," I said.

Nicholas stared at me. "You don't mean to tell me that you drink urine as well?"

"Every day," I replied matter-of-factly.

Now it was Berham's turn to stare at me. He asked, "You weren't drinking urine when we were together in Bodhgaya, were you?"

"No. I started in Delhi not long after I last saw you. I began with a seven-day urine fast and ever since then I've been drinking a glass of urine first thing every morning."

"I don't believe you guys. Did you both conspire to convince me that urine is good for what ails me?" Nicholas couldn't even wait for a reply. He was up and out of his seat in a flash. "I've got to go back to my room. I'll pay for my tea on the way out. See you."

As soon as Nicholas had left the restaurant Berham and I burst out laughing.

"You and I didn't conspire to meet like this, but the universe has done a good job." I laughed. "The poor guy looked a little shocked. You might have thought I had conjured up a glass of urine right before his eyes."

“Well, it’s not every day that you end up sitting across the table from two urine-drinkers. I can sympathize with him,” Berham interjected. A waiter came by and I ordered a cup of hot ginger with honey. All this talk of urine had made me thirsty.

“When did you start drinking urine, Berham?” I asked.

“Within weeks after I said goodbye to you, John. I saw an article about it in a newspaper, of all places. I thought it would be worth a try for my bronchitis and malaria.”

“Has it helped?” I asked.

“I think so. My bronchitis has definitely improved and I haven’t had a recurrence of malaria since I began with the urine and it has been about, let’s see, five, six ... ah ... seven months now.”

I sat quietly for a moment and then said, “I thought of you when I did my initial fast in Delhi. I really wanted you to find out about urine therapy, Berham. The intention of my focused thought may have reached you. What do you think?”

“We both know that anything is possible,” he replied thoughtfully. “The important thing is that we both fortuitously found a simple, readily available healing tool and we are using it. In the course of time we can monitor the results. As you also know, it is often quite difficult to isolate the significance of any one healing agent. I also do a lot of yoga and meditation and I’m sure that benefits my health as well.”

Berham and I went on to share many peaceful walks, talks and meals over the next weeks. An aunt and uncle of his ran a shop in the main square across from the bus stop in McLeod Ganj and he visited them almost daily. He stayed alone in a little hut in the hills above the village. Here he was able to devote much of his time to yoga and meditation.

Berham told me of his dreams of teaching on his own soon. This, it turns out, was to manifest as he began in the coming years to pass on his personal interpretations of Buddhist thought and teachings to groups in North America, India and Europe. I am sure that his gentle, kind presence continues to touch and transform many a life.



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An Unusual Physicist

One evening I shared a meal with a group of German and Austrian visitors. The restaurant was packed so we were, out of necessity, thrust together at one long table. We made the best of it, got acquainted, and shared some stories and laughter.

The next day I walked down to the Tibetan Library. Once again I was drawn to the collection of current *East West* magazines, in which I had previously read of Chinese medical schools in America. In one I found an article expounding the theories of physicist David Bohm. This well known scientist had developed what he called a holographic view of the universe that seemed to straddle that subtle boundary where science and spirituality meet. He had been able to deduce that each and every unit within the universe contains the knowledge or memory of the whole. The distinctions of time and space melted into a continuum of existence. This dovetailed nicely with my personal mystical experience the first time I was in Dharmasala. Past, present, and future all merged into the ever-present now. Even the fact that the human body was mapped out and could be treated by using acupuncture or acupressure on points on the hands, feet, ears and tongue supported Bohm's hypothesis. Distinctions between within and without, creator and created, disappeared into a holographic all-inclusive whole.

I returned to McLeod Ganj for an early evening meal. As I was about to order, one of the people from the previous night's meal walked into the restaurant and up to my table.

"Do you mind if I join you?" asked this man in excellent German-accented English. He was of medium height with dark

brown hair and beard, and kind hazel-colored eyes. He looked to be about thirty.

"By all means," I responded. The restaurant was still almost empty. We ordered our meals.

"I'm Jurgen; in case you don't remember from last night," he said. "What have you been doing today?"

This was a fortunate beginning to the conversation since I had completely forgotten his name. "And I'm John," I said. "In answer to your question; I've been down to the Tibetan Library." A waiter came with hot lemon drinks for both of us.

I continued, "I read a fascinating article about the universe as postulated by a theoretical physicist by the name of David Bohm. I won't go on and on about it because you may not understand."

"Oh," replied Jurgen. "You might be surprised about my understanding. I am also a theoretical physicist. I work at Oldenburg University in Germany."

I had to smile. This was a most interesting coincidence.

We enjoyed a stimulating conversation covering a wide range of subjects. He described some of his research that seemed to connect the current views of science to the personally-obtained knowledge of the rishis and yogis of yesterday and today. Jurgen had discovered a ritual and mantras associated with ancient timeless Hindu purification practices called Agni Hotra.

Jurgen explained, "I've been interviewing and recording the views of several yogis on these practices. With the help of translators I've done my best to determine the meaning of these Sanskrit mantras. One of these rituals is always done on full moon, which it happens to be tonight.

"My Austrian roommate, another scientist, is not open to these things. Can I do this ritual in your room now?"

"Why not?" I replied. "Just don't count on my staying awake for too long. I'm not a night person."

As we walked to my room I felt that now familiar sensation of being swept along in a great cosmic dance. There seemed to be little doubt that I had free will. But when I surrendered to the world of the heart and intuition rather than the world of the head and thinking, all manner of magic transpired. There was never a dull moment. Were there unseen teachers helping to orchestrate

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all these seemingly synchronistic meetings that led me, step by step, to a deeper understanding of myself and this world?

“‘Agni’ is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘fire,’” explained Jurgen as he prepared a space in my room for the rite. He unpacked a small bag filled with a few items including little irregularly-shaped dried wafers looking suspiciously like something that comes out of the back end of a cow.

He continued, “We’ll be burning these small pieces of dried cow dung while reciting a special mantram which I will show you.”

What have I got myself in for this time? I thought.

“Cow dung is sacred to the Hindus. In an overpopulated land with vastly depleted forests cow dung serves as a much needed fuel. It is also used as a plaster on walls and is believed to protect inhabitants from harmful energies.”

As strange as this last statement seemed at the time, the experience of Chernobyl was to support this viewpoint. The only people living in the vicinity of the nuclear disaster who didn’t become sick or die were some poor villagers still living in the old ways. Their simple homes were plastered with cow dung and researchers could find nothing else that distinguished these still healthy people from their suffering neighbors, who had been living in more modern structures.

“What’s that oil?” I asked.

“That is ghee or clarified butter. Ghee is formed by heating butter and straining off the sediment and impurities that float to the top. It assists in burning the dung. In addition it appears to add some other subtle energy to the process.”

Jurgen now handed me a thin copper pot and asked, “What does this remind you of?”

As I turned the pot over in my hands it suddenly dawned on me just what it looked like. “If held upside down it reminds me of the Step Pyramid of Saqqara that I once visited in Egypt,” I replied, wondering if I was correct.

“That’s right.” Jurgen smiled. “This is a tiny replica constructed by a Polish friend of mine to the same relative dimensions and angles of the Step Pyramid built thousands of years ago in Egypt.”

He took the pot from me and set it on its base so that it looked like an upside down pyramid. "There is one more element needed," he said, pulling a small satchel of uncooked brown rice kernels from his bag.

He then carefully stacked a few pieces of dung in the pot and dribbled a liberal amount of ghee over the fuel. "For me, getting the fire started is the most difficult part. That is why I use so much ghee." It reminded me of pouring lighter fluid over charcoal in a barbeque. Jurgen then started the tiny fire with a match. Soon my room was permeated with the strange, pungent odor of burning cow dung. I opened up a window to let some smoke out and some fresh air in. At this moment I wasn't too worried if a few mosquitoes decided to enter as well.

Jurgen now pulled a compass from his seemingly bottomless bag of tricks. He explained, "Like all pyramids, this one needs to be aligned with the cardinal points of the compass. In this way what we do will work with the magnetic field of the earth."

I nodded mutely. I mentally decided to make sense of all this some other time when I wasn't so tired.

Jurgen continued, "I will sit here and you can sit anywhere else near the pot."

I then started the game I used to play with campfires as a boy. Wherever I sat the smoke seemed to follow me! There wasn't that much of a breeze coming through the open window. I surrendered, sat down and stayed sitting opposite Jurgen and listened as he began the mantram, "*Om Trayam Bakam...*"

He broke off for a moment and said, "I usually do this for hours so please feel free to go to bed when you wish."

He resumed intoning the mantram and at the end of each cycle he added one grain of rice to the fire. Periodically an additional piece of cow dung was added as fuel. I began to chant with him,

"Om Trayam Bakam Sugandhim

Pushti Vardhanam

Urva Rukamiva Bandhanam

Mrityor Mukshiva nam Ritat

Svaha

Om Trayam Bakam ..."

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The minutes stretched into hours. Finally I could stay awake no longer. I slipped exhausted into bed, my last memory before falling asleep was of this bearded man sitting on the floor chanting by the flickering light of a tiny fire, “*Om Trayam Bakam...*”

When I awoke in the morning the room was empty. For a moment I thought the previous night was all a dream. Then I sniffed and noticed the distinctive aroma of burnt cow dung.

Jurgen joined me in the Green Hotel restaurant as I was finishing my breakfast.

“Here,” he said, handing me a little bag.

I opened it to find some ash.

“That is from last night. This sacred ash has a healing power. You can sprinkle it on your food or give it to someone else in need of healing. You can also put the ash in a garden and it will help to revitalize the soil. Your room and the atmosphere in the surrounding area have been purified by the ritual performed last night. Thank you for letting me use your room.”

“Thank you,” I said, sprinkling a little of the ash on the last of my tsampa porridge. I can’t say that it added much to the flavor of the dish but I ate it with gratitude.

After breakfast Jurgen joined me on the hotel rooftop where Lucia used to do her yoga. It was a warm morning. Wisps of thin white clouds danced with the sun, casting intermittent shadows across the roof.

“Have you ever heard of reflexology?” Jurgen asked.

“Is that the same as foot massage?” I responded.

“Yes. People have mapped out all parts of the body on the feet. Pressing and massaging specific points on the feet helps break down acid crystals in the feet and in turn aids in the flow of energy to the corresponding area in the body.”

“Isn’t that related to David Bohm’s idea that each part contains the whole?” I asked.

“Yes. I suppose you could say that it is,” replied Jurgen. “My partner uses reflexology with clients and she puts a lot of focus on the colon.”

“On the what?”

“On the colon,” he repeated. “That’s the large intestine. Let me show you.”

Jurgen proceeded to massage my feet briefly and then he drew a diagram showing where the colon was found on the soles of the feet. He explained that all the organs of the body could be mapped on to the colon which in turn was mapped on to the feet. Was there no end to the correlations between apparently disparate parts?

"I massage the colon, as it appears on my feet, every day. This helps with digestion and constipation. Do it every day on your own feet if you can," he suggested.

"I'll do my best," I said. I dared not tell him that constipation was the least of my problems. Still, I supposed that it couldn't hurt with diarrhea either.

Jurgen checked his watch. "I've got to go back to my room now. Every day at a prearranged time Moni, my girlfriend, sits in meditation in Germany and I sit in meditation wherever I happen to be. We take turns sending telepathic messages to each other. We each write down the messages that we send and the messages that we think we receive. When I return home we'll compare notes."

I must say that Jurgen was unlike any physicist I had ever met. But, then again, the only other physicists I had met were a couple of professors in my first year at university. Jurgen left Dharmasala later that day but not before leaving his address and inviting me to visit should I ever be in Germany.

Rabies

"Ow!"

The Tibetan family living next to me in the Green Hotel had a cute little long-haired dog. He would often greet me with a friendly bark when I entered or left my room. I would reciprocate by giving the animal a scratch or a pet. This time, instead of wagging its tail and licking me the little dog bit my hand, drawing blood.

McLeod Ganj had a large population of stray dogs, and rabies occasionally displayed its gruesome face. I heard that just five years earlier there had been a nasty outbreak of rabies in

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Dharmasala. Over a dozen children at the Tibetan Children's Village were bitten by rabid dogs and two boys died.

During my first visit in March I had been nipped by a dog on my way to Tushita Retreat Center in the forest above town. The road up to this retreat center had a series of sharp, hairpin turns. One often encountered wild monkeys on this road, looking for handouts. If you ignored them and gave them a wide berth they wouldn't bother you. Once, in order to cut off the distance of one of the switchbacks I set off through the forest. It was surprisingly bereft of undergrowth so it was relatively easy to pick my way through.

I heard a rustling sound. I stopped and looked in the direction of the noise. I saw nothing. Then I heard a sound on the other side, like the footsteps of a child on loose leaves. I turned to look. This was no child. It was a full grown monkey, a male I believe, and he was approaching threateningly. I didn't dare take my eyes off him. I used my peripheral vision to look around, and to my horror I found I was in the middle of a large group of monkeys. On the road one only ever saw a few adults. Here I quickly ascertained that I was in the middle of an extended family grouping of perhaps twenty-five animals. I was completely surrounded; and whether I proceeded or retreated I would have to go through the group.

I decided to advance slowly. The mothers and babies and juvenile monkeys backed away while some large males repeatedly sprang at me and made aggressive, hissing threats.

"It's OK," I said as softly and calmly as possible. My heart was pounding and I'm sure the animals could sense my fear. Still, I reasoned that I would have to stay calm or this could end in serious injury, for me. Now I said, "I mean you no harm."

The closest males grabbed at my pant legs. If they pulled me down now I'd be in big trouble. At this point there was definitely no turning back.

"Sorry folks, I don't mean to disturb you," I crooned softly. My words had a hollow ring to them. I knew they wouldn't understand my words but I prayed that they would feel the intention behind the words. I continued walking slowly and deliberately through the group, speaking softly all the time. I was

in the middle of the forest, alone with the monkeys. I couldn't expect help. I knew I would have to get out of this on my own.

Some of the males were now biting my pants. This was getting a trifle sticky. Still I continued my slow walk and soft talk through the group of animals.

"Ah. Thank God," I murmured to myself as I finally broke through and the aggressive males returned to the group of monkeys clustered behind me. Aside from a few small tears in my pants I had escaped without a scratch. This was one time I appreciated that it was inappropriate to wear shorts in India. I was also thankful that my pants were rather baggy.

The little dog next door had always been friendly and its unusual and aggressive bite set off alarm bells in my head. *What if the dog had rabies?* I wondered. *Would I need shots?* I sincerely hoped not. I was convinced that at least some of my severe liver damage had been due to vaccinations and other Western medical interventions. I was determined not to use allopathic medical drugs again.

For a couple of days I went about my routine with a storm of conflict going on inside. I was even reluctant to ask Yeshi Dhonden for his opinion, so I put off one of my regular appointments with him.

A few days later, I saw that that the neighbors' dog was no longer sitting in its usual place. He was nowhere to be seen. I realized that a decision needed to be made. I got up the courage to visit Yeshi Dhonden. In the waiting room I saw the Tibetan family that owned the dog. I concluded that they must also have been bitten. They didn't speak English so I would have to wait to find out more.

My turn came and I reluctantly entered the room. I explained to Yeshi through Khalsang about the dog bite.

"Do I need to get rabies shots?" I asked regretfully.

"Did the bite break your skin?" came Khalsang's response after discussion with Yeshi.

"Yes," I replied immediately.

"Then you need the shots."

"Is there nothing you can do?" I asked pleadingly.

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After more discussion between these two kind Tibetan men Khalsang turned to me and said, "You need to get the injections. You should go down to the hospital in Dharmsala as soon as possible. This is serious, John."

"Thanks," I said, getting to my feet. Khalsang's words had a ring of finality to them. The next patients were my neighbors and we looked curiously at each other as we passed.

I walked back slowly to the hotel, resigned to my fate. Thus began a regular pilgrimage to the hospital in Dharmsala for anti-rabies injections into my belly. I suppose, in retrospect, the experience has been valuable. I had rejected Western Medicine *carte blanche*. I probably wouldn't be alive today without the medical assistance received for the meningitis in Norway. Similarly, I needed this experience with the rabid dog to see that Western Medicine has its place. In order to be free one needs to embrace the whole of creation and, each step of the way, choose wisely and consciously. Perhaps the path to supreme health and well-being is, indeed, awareness. I seemed to have a long way to go.

Kai and Vedanta

I was so impressed with Yeshe Dhonden that I would recommend that people go to see him whether they were sick or not. So it was with an Australian couple, Kai and Vedanta. Kai recounted his visit to Dr. Dhonden. Yeshe read his wrist pulses, looked into his eyes, and then said to Kai through his translator, Khalsang, "You were born into a poor family in a cold country. The food you received in early childhood was not adequate for the proper development of your digestive system. Therefore you became constipated. Later in life you stopped eating meat and you got diarrhea." He then prescribed a very specific set of herbal tablets to be taken for seven months. Yeshe stated that all would be well after seven months as his digestive system would be supported by the herbs to now, finally, develop properly. Kai was astounded at the diagnosis since he had told the doctor that he was from Australia, which, for the most part, is far from being a cold place.

Otherwise he had told him nothing. Kai then explained to me that he was born into a poor family in Finland. There was often not much food to go around. Years later he had emigrated to Australia and became a vegetarian. At that time the chronic constipation he had always had was replaced with chronic diarrhea.

I first met Kai and Vedanta in one of McLeod Ganj's Western oriented restaurants. I then saw them a week or two later with their two daughters. They explained to me that their trip began with all four of them flying from Australia to England to visit Vedanta's family. The children stayed on with their grandparents while Vedanta and Kai flew to India for some time on their own. Ten days later the girls, aged ten and twelve, had flown on their own on a direct flight to New Delhi where they were met by their parents. Then all four of them had traveled together to McLeod Ganj where they had each day done something interesting and educational for the children. I enjoyed sitting with them for evening meals, hearing of their exploits, often enthusiastically described by one or both of the girls. Amongst other things they had had a personal audience with the Dalai Lama. They were particularly excited one evening as they recalled their day spent with an oracle who had gone into trance to help several Tibetan families.

The last night before they left McLeod Ganj to return to Australia, I sat with this wonderful family of four in their hotel room after we had all thoroughly enjoyed a meal together. Vedanta was a qualified yoga teacher and she explained the story behind her name.

"I studied yoga for a long time with an Indian teacher. At the end of an intensive period of yoga training, I participated in an initiation ceremony and I was given a spiritual name," said Vedanta.

"What was that?" I asked.

"Gyan, which means knowledge," she replied. "I never really liked the name and I didn't use it much in place of my birth name. Many years later I did more intensive yoga training with another Indian Yoga Master. At the end of this period of training he gave me my present name, Vedanta. Do you know what Vedanta means?"

"No," I responded.

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“I didn’t know either at the time. This teacher, whom I really liked and respected, explained to me that Vedanta meant completion of knowledge. This felt really good to me and Vedanta has been my name ever since.”

I was really taken with this story and, as was my habit at the time, I wrote about this and other daily events in my journal when I returned to my room in the Green Hotel before calling it a night. When I wrote down Vedanta’s story I couldn’t recall her first spiritual name, Gyan; so in place of Gyan in my journal I left an underlined space and I explained that the word, whatever it was, meant ‘knowledge’. I then forgot about it, not very concerned with whether I found out or not. Kai, Vedanta and the children had left the previous night, not long after I said goodbye, on a night bus to Delhi; so I would not be able to get this detail from them.

The following day I walked all the way down to Dharmsala, where I caught the bus to the hospital for my rabies injection. After my return bus trip I decided to walk back up to McLeod Ganj. Part way up the hill I met an Indian man I had often seen standing in the corner of Yeshe Dhonden’s office with acupuncture needles sticking out of his shoulders. He had come all the way from Detroit, Michigan to be treated by Yeshe Dhonden. This time he was accompanied by an Indian man with white hair and a teenaged boy.

“Hi John,” he said as our paths crossed. “This is my brother-in-law and my nephew. My brother-in-law’s name is Gyan—that means knowledge.”

“Thanks,” I replied, grinning. “That’s just what I needed to know.” I pondered this synchronicity as I continued my long walk up the hill. Was this another cosmic joke? Was it important to write down the things that one wanted to learn? Was it just as important to let go of what one clearly expressed one wished to learn? Isn’t it fascinating how one answer spawned so many questions along my path of longing to understand?

Iyengar Yoga Classes

“Hi John.”

It was a beautiful sunny day. I turned from my negotiations with the fruit and vegetable vendor to see who was calling my name.

“Hi Daniel. Hi Sylvie,” I called out. It was my Swiss friends. Daniel was a tiny man with an effervescent smile, twinkling eyes and straight, light brown hair. He was always cheerful. Sylvie, with thick, dark shoulder-length hair, was a little shyer. Still, she was also a warm and friendly person. For the past couple of months they had been renting a run-down old mansion in the forested hills above McLeod Ganj. We had become fast friends. More than once on a rainy day I had found myself sitting with them over a simple meal on the lounge floor in this crumbling remnant of British colonial times. We would discuss diet, spirituality, yoga or one of the other interests we shared.

“John. We just heard that an Indian teacher is soon going to begin a series of daily yoga classes,” Daniel said. His first language was French so these words came slowly and deliberately from his smiling mouth.

“Where and when?” I asked.

“The classes will be in that hall around the corner from your hotel. It is a four week course. We have decided to do it.” Daniel continued to speak for them both. Sylvie was not at all confident in English.

“Would you like to join us?” Daniel asked.

“What kind of yoga is it?” I asked.

“Iyengar,” replied Daniel.

“What’s that?” I asked. This seemed to be my day for questions.

“We’re going to have a cup of tea. Why don’t you join us and we can discuss it further,” Daniel suggested, still smiling. I wondered if he smiled in his sleep.

“As long as I get to have my own cup of tea,” I said. We all laughed.

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I completed my shopping and soon the three of us were sitting in a restaurant over cups of hot lemon and ginger. Daniel began to explain.

“Have you seen the book *Light on Yoga*?”

“Bien sur,” I replied. “It seems to be in every used book store in India. It is almost as common as *Lord of the Rings*.” B.K.S. Iyengar wrote the bestselling *Light on Yoga* and the form of yoga named after him is practiced all over the world.

Some days later Daniel and Sylvie came by and the three of us attended a mid-morning class with an Indian man in his twenties. His English girlfriend helped with the classes. We were led through a series of asanas, most of which required some wooden blocks. I found this a little strange but I went along with it all in the beginning. This lithe young teacher seemed to be intent, to a certain extent, on showing off his obvious skills and flexibility. He encouraged us to push in order to quickly gain more flexibility.

I was holding a posture to the maximum extent that I could stretch at the time.

“Let me help you go further with that,” said Patek, the teacher, as he approached me.

“This is OK for me, thanks,” I said.

He grabbed one of my arms and twisted it further.

“There,” he said. “That’s the way it is to be done.”

I felt a muscle pull. Anger stirred within me. How dare he push me like that? I knew what my current limitations were, better than anyone else. I said nothing and completed the class. Later I walked home in pain, escorted by my Swiss friends.

In the next few classes I observed closely the methods of this teacher with other students. I was not impressed. The lessons were reminiscent of the class I had attended in Delhi. In my eyes, there seemed to be too much focus on the physical, on displaying for others what is possible. In my daily hatha yoga practice I had already been encouraged by a significant improvement in flexibility over a number of months. This came about through consistent daily effort without pushing too hard.

I decided to stop these new classes. I had enough to work with for the present time with the exercises Lucia had shown me.

I had learned a valuable lesson I was to put to use in the future when I would teach classes myself. Each person is evolving and growing at his or her own evolutionary pace. A teacher's job is to encourage others to reach for their highest potential by providing a gentle and clear example. There is no rush. Each of us, through razor-sharp intention and consistent and unflagging daily effort, can attain our individual goals. We need to be steadfast in the application of our efforts through periods in which we seem to grow in leaps and bounds and others in which we seem to be standing still. Growth works in its own beautiful rhythmic way. We don't have to push it.

A Toning Experience

"Where are you going?"

I was aroused from my joyful state of walking meditation through the forest. It was a man I had met briefly over lunch one day. He was a strongly built brown-haired Austrian in his early thirties.

"I'm on my way to visit some friends who live at an old house in the forest," I answered.

"May I join you?"

"Yes."

We continued on our way. I was curious why this man had approached me in such an intentional way. He began, without encouragement from me, to explain what was on his mind.

"I do a practice where I chant vowel tones out loud. This is especially powerful when shared with others. Would you like to do this with me?"

This sounded (no pun intended) much like what Jay had described to me in Northern Pakistan. I couldn't pass up this opportunity.

"Come with me now if you have the time," I said. "We can ask my friends, Daniel and Sylvie, if they would like to join."

When we arrived at the old house in the forest we were greeted with welcoming hugs by this humble Swiss couple. Sylvie was

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busy with washing. Daniel had been cutting wood for the wood stove. Sylvie opted out but Daniel's response was affirmative.

"Aaaaaaaah."

So we began. Led by this new Austrian friend we sat together cross-legged on the floor, eyes closed, chanting first one vowel tone and then the next. We spent roughly five minutes on each tone. Sylvie could be vaguely heard in the background, drying dishes. Waves of giggling came up. Resistance takes many forms and giggling is often one of the first signs of letting go of old tensions. When our outwardly-directed sounds were completed we sat together in silence. What a blissful feeling this was. I had found something, a tool, which I would use again and again over the years.

Tarot Rose

Afterwards we shared a meal, something I loved to do with Daniel and Sylvie. Perhaps it was the coziness of sitting in a real house with good friends. What a contrast to the hotel rooms that were my usual Asian abode.

"John. There is a people we think you have to meet," Sylvie said in her charming rudimentary English.

"Who's that?" I asked.

"Her name is Rose," Daniel replied. "She is from Australia. She is staying in one of those little rooms to the side of this house. You have seen those buildings. The way she speaks of peace and spirit reminds us always of you. Would you like to meet her?"

"Yes," I replied. "Why not?"

A few evenings later I was seated by the fire in their charismatic old estate. Daniel and Sylvie had put together a feast from the food we had all contributed. I was seated across from Rose, a lovely woman with long dark hair and twinkling eyes. She was in her mid-thirties and made a striking goddess-like figure in her bright rose-colored sari. She was the sort of woman who stood out in a crowd. She explained that she was busy writing a book

about Tarot, which she had been busy with for a long time. She spoke with a quiet authority, born of her considerable experience of working with the cards.

"How exactly does Tarot work?" I asked, the name conjuring up vague images of witches and ancient ceremonies in my mind's eye.

"If you're open to it, John, I can explain it to you while I do a spread of cards for you," Rose suggested. "With Tarot a picture is definitely worth a thousand words."

"Sure," I responded.

She pulled out a set of cards with beautiful pictures and spread them out on the carpet face down.

"Where do Tarot cards originate, Rose?" I asked.

"The oldest cards still in existence date back to the Renaissance, but there is plenty of evidence supporting their use in ancient Egypt. I use them as a tool for self knowledge and for assisting others with inner awareness and clarity. There was a time when the cards fell into disrepute, being said to be the work of the Devil. This was understandable because anything that aided individuals in self discovery and understanding flew in the face of the authority of the Church and the Church's desire for people to blindly follow dogma. Would you draw some cards please?"

I did as she asked and placed the cards on the floor in a prescribed pattern indicated by Rose.

Rose went on to explain her interpretation of the cards I had drawn. It was very obvious to me that she possessed extraordinary knowledge of the symbolism of the ancient images. This knowledge, coupled with an intuitive awareness of the deeper meaning of the cards, gave her the ability to discern patterns in my life choices that were useful to me. In the weeks to come I observed Rose helping many travelers in this way with her unique skills.

Rose began to explain, "These three cards relate to the past, the present and to the future. This does not mean that we are attempting to divine your future. It means that in understanding the present moment we can see that our potential future arises out of the choices we make now. Likewise, we can see that the present is a consequence of decisions made in the past."

"Makes sense to me," I interjected.

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I had returned to McLeod Ganj in order to get additional assistance from Yeshi Dhonden. The original stock of herbal pills I had taken to Pakistan was now finished. Day by day I had been physically feeling better but the diarrhea that was eventually to last for the entire eleven months I spent on the subcontinent, persisted. During this present visit in McLeod Ganj Yeshi Dhonden had prescribed additional herbal remedies for my digestion and the diarrhea had improved. Coincidentally I often developed cramps and the only solution was to release some wind. This proved to be easy enough when I was alone, reading or walking; but, as can be imagined, it was not always so easy to ‘let a little go’ while in the company of others. Sitting on the floor with Rose I realized, to my horror, that my cramps were building quickly. I was not impressed with the timing of this. I had only met the woman moments before.

Rose continued her explanation, at this time oblivious of my predicament. “This card means that you are about to claim your place in the world as a king; not in the old sense of royal families, but as a master of your own destiny.”

This master was finding it more and more difficult to hold in his wind.

“As you tune into your inner longings and closely monitor your thoughts and feelings your life will unfold in an increasingly powerful and joyful way.”

How prophetic! There certainly was a lot of power building up in me at that moment.

“This power can take many forms...” Rose’s words were like nectar, sweet and smooth, but they were no balm for what ailed me now. I couldn’t hold on any longer and my inner power took the form of a prolonged series of loud staccato farts. I lay on the floor like a recumbent Spitfire sputtering spasmodically to life. I felt as though I could be airborne any moment. I didn’t look forward to disentangling my body from the light fixture overhead.

I looked up at Rose, hugely embarrassed. Rose’s face registered a rapid series of emotional reactions—astonishment, shock, disbelief, and then, to my relief, a smile formed on her visage. She said, calmly, “I’ve never had such a dynamic response to a Tarot reading.”

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We collapsed in paroxysms of laughter and, yes, as Rose had predicted, joy.

A moment of calm returned. "I'll have to call you Tarot Rose," I said. By now Daniel and Sylvie had joined us. Perhaps we were all a little tired for soon all of us dissolved in laughter.



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A French Saddhu

Despite our awkward beginning Rose and I soon became fast friends. Together we enjoyed long walks and many extended conversation-filled meals. One day over a lengthy lunch Rose said, “Before I met you there was a French man staying here. I fell deeply in love with him. He dresses only in a vivid blue longi and is living the life of a saddhu. His name is Vivekananda. I call him Vivek.”

“Do you mean he is a saddhu as in a sort of spiritual wanderer?” I asked.

“Yes. In giving up family attachments and possessions a saddhu is dedicated to the search for Truth. It is a timeless Indian tradition that draws people to live such a devoted life. These people sleep wherever they find shelter and they rely upon the generosity of others for their physical nourishment. They rely upon God and their inner resources for spiritual nourishment.

“Vivek has lived in this way in India for a long time. I have seen him sit absolutely still in meditation for many hours at a time. Once he sat in the lotus seemingly totally oblivious to the outer world for 48 hours. I was living with him at the time and I became concerned that he would need something to drink or to eat. He became impatient with what he called my ‘over concern’ and that marked the beginning of the end of our relationship. But, I must say, I still love him.” Rose paused, tears forming in her eyes. “I’ve never met such a determined man.”

“Where is Vivek now?” I asked.

Rose dried her eyes and answered, “He’s in Manali as far as I know.”

"I've heard of Manali," I said. "Where exactly is that?"

"Like here it's in the Himalayan foothills but it is roughly south-east of here. If I can get my Indian visa extended I'm going to visit him. Unfortunately, I'm not very patient with these civil servants who make you wait for ages or shuffle you around from desk to desk. I've been trying for days to get this visa extended and, until now, I've had zero success. I've really had enough of this bureaucratic bullshit!" Rose blew her nose. If an Indian bureaucrat had just then walked by I think she would have throttled him.

"I'll tell you what, Rose," I interjected. "I'm going down to Dharmsala for another rabies injection tomorrow. If you like, I can accompany you to the immigration office which is near the hospital. After my experience in Saudi Arabia I don't find these paper pushers the least bit exasperating. I'm sure we can get your visa extended."

"Really, John. That's very generous of you. I'm still not confident about the visa but I'd love to have your help. You know, I really think you should meet Vivek. The two of you have a very similar energy. Would you like to join me in going to Manali?"

I thought for a moment and then replied, "Yes, I do believe I would enjoy that, Rose. I feel you and I still have much to share and your description of Vivek intrigues me. I would consider it an honor to accompany you."

In the course of a couple of visits to government offices in the next few days we succeeded in extending Rose's visitor permit. It seemed that the Indian authorities had more respect for a tall man dressed in white than for a Western woman dressed in pink.

Before leaving Dharmsala I said goodbye to several friends including Berham and Daniel and Sylvie. I knew that I would not be back in this special place for a long time. This left me with some feelings of regret. So much had happened to me here. I was not the same person I had been when I arrived in McLeod Ganj for the first time in February. Before boarding the bus with Rose I had one more very important goodbye to make.

I seated myself in the office of Yeshi Dhonden facing the great and infinitely humble man. I had not told him of my departure plans. I was about to make an explanation to Khalsang, when

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Yeshe's contemplative expression transformed instantly into a huge smile. He reached behind my head and playfully tugged on my ponytail. Once again he demonstrated that words are unnecessary when understanding is complete. I don't know exactly how he knew but I knew that he knew that I was leaving. His totally spontaneous gesture was a real blessing to me. I responded in kind by just as playfully rubbing his recently shorn head. This brief exchange marked the only outward, physical expression of tenderness we had displayed in the many months we had known each other.

Yeshe gave me one last prescription for herbal 'droppings', I got his mailing address from Khalsang, and I was on my way, feeling enormously blessed and grateful for the opportunity to have shared so much with this gentle lama.

Our bus trip, after a pre-dawn departure, lasted for twelve numbing hours, winding almost constantly as we traversed the green foothills on our way to Manali. Most of the time I was lost in thought or in conversation with Rose but, it seemed that almost every time I looked out of the window I would see another elevation sign or a road mileage marker. Each time the numbers were either 777 (for example, 777 meters elevation) or 111. This uncanny experience was to repeat itself many, many times in the years to come. I'm still not sure what it means; but the experience is nearly always accompanied by a warm feeling that appears to say, "You are not alone." It also seems to support my theory that there is a mathematical perfection to the universe.

Our time with Vivek in Manali was destined to last only a few days. I could see why Rose was attracted to him. With his distinctive royal blue longi, bare, fit torso, sharp featured face and long dark hair Vivek stood out in a crowd even more than Rose did. True, he was a little younger than Rose, but he seemed to exude a wisdom and self-assuredness far beyond his years. With his soft French-accented English and his gentle, confident voice one could imagine how easily he could convince others to assist him monetarily in his chosen 'profession' as saddhu.

Deep down Rose had hoped that the two of them would resume their intimate relationship but this was not to be. Vivek was enjoying the company of another younger Western woman. Rose

and Vivek shared some long walks while I read, caught up on my journal, went for solitary walks, or enjoyed the delicious whole grain bread and local honey Vivek had procured for us. Rose, to her credit, soon acknowledged the futility of her hope to reunite with Vivek.

Rose had brought from Australia a huge stack of transcripts she had made from the channeled words of Ramas, a disincarnate teacher. Her intention had been to write a book while in India and these channeled notes of Ramas were to have figured prominently in her writing. But life on the subcontinent had taken a different turn and she was approaching the end of her time in India.

"I won't be using these now, John. Feel free to go through them," she said to me one day.

I had the time and the inclination so I poured over the notes at every opportunity. One day I was sitting on the bed in my room, reading the transcripts, when Rose came by for a visit.

"Rose. There is phrase in these notes that really strikes me. Would you like to hear it?" I asked.

"Yes," she assented.

"*All desire comes from a sense of lack.*" I looked up to see Rose turning white.

"I know these are profound words, but I didn't expect that response. Have you seen a ghost?"

Rose took a deep breath and explained, "I just had a flashback to a dream I had two years ago. It really struck me as special at the time and I wrote it down. In a mountain setting exactly like where we are now my movie hero of the time, Robert Redford, was sitting with a black scarf like you have on now, and he said those very same words to me.

"In the passport photo you gave me, you look like Robert Redford. This experience makes me wonder how much life is predetermined. Otherwise, how could I have dreamt of this event fully two years in advance?"

I expressed no answer for this, but it seemed to confirm my realization that there is, in reality, no time, no past or future, only the ever-present now.

I thought about this idea of lack for a long time. If one believes there isn't enough there can be a tendency to walk over others in order to acquire more in an attempt to overcome this feeling of

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lack. I was reminded again of those words of Gandhi's which stated there was enough for everyone's needs, but not necessarily for everyone's greed. Granted, we live in a universe of infinite possibilities and absolute abundance. Scarcity doesn't exist in such a scenario. But it would appear that when some individuals scratch and claw and play corporate games in order to acquire far more than enough, others come up short.

If we are all cells in the body of humanity, would it not make sense that the human who gobbles up an amount way beyond sufficiency at the expense of others and the environment is acting like a cancerous cell? In our individual bodies we have perfect health when each and every one of our three trillion cells works together in perfect harmony with every other cell. When some cells become cancerous, other cells are threatened. Ultimately the host organism, the human body, is threatened and sometimes dies.

I could see that this planet Earth will attain perfect health when each member of the human family learns to work in complete cooperation with every other human. There is no need to compete. There is no need for winners and losers. There is sufficient supply for everyone to be a winner. We simply need to learn to share our collective resources.

I could see that I needed to learn to live with less. A person's true wealth is determined not by what one has, but by what one can happily live without.

This backpacking life was a great learning opportunity for me. I felt so content when all my necessary possessions fitted into a bag I could carry on my back. I could see that my earlier dreams of becoming a millionaire had been colored and conditioned by the world I grew up in. While in business school my heroes had been entrepreneurs. My new dreams encompassed the concept of harmonious community, of sharing skills and supply, of living with sufficiency, rather than over-abundance. I wanted to continue to live as close to need level as I could while others in this world didn't have enough.

Rose spoke with Vivek about me. He grew quite intrigued and expressed his desire to make up an astrological chart and reading for me. I was open to this. In Vivek I felt I was meeting a kindred spirit, a brother in peace. According to Rose he was a trained

astrologer with a deep intuitive connection with his craft. He asked for my birth details which I gladly supplied. He went to a local man to borrow an ephemeris and proceeded to draw up a chart.

One afternoon the three of us shared a mouth-watering fruit salad spiced with ginger that we had collectively prepared. Afterwards Rose went for a walk and Vivek and I sat together for an astrological reading. He took a moment to tune in and then gave a succinct interpretation of my birth chart. He explained, "Your diarrhea is related to your difficulty in digesting the myriad of new concepts and possibilities you are being confronted with in India. Your life has been turned upside down."

"But I thought I would have diarrhea for as long as it took for me to learn to spell 'diarrhea'," I said. We both laughed.

"I repeat, your life has been turned upside down and it will never be the same again."

I could definitely relate to these words.

"There is something else I would like to share with you, John," Vivek continued in his wonderful French accent. "Over this last year I have had many visions. I see a war in what looks like Iran and Iraq; a big one. I have also had visions of a huge flood covering much of India."

I made no comment on this. It was a prophecy of doom I wanted nothing to do with, so I changed the subject.

"Don't you ever get a longing to return to France?" I asked.

"I may go back once but I really want to spend the rest of my life in the Himalayas."

This seemed to be a courageous plan to me. We dialogued further and then Vivek finished with the following words of advice for me, "Make your possessions few and be prepared to move quickly."

How prophetic these words have proven to be.

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Working for World Peace

Rose and I meandered back to Delhi with a stop in Simla, yet another colonial hill station. Simla (pronounced 'shimla') is the end point of a twisting, narrow-gauge railway that draws many Indian visitors. In this picturesque town I had my ninth and last rabies injection. I decided to forgo the tenth one. Rose and I exchanged books and discussed their contents. Two that she lent me still stand out in my mind. One was Ken Carey's *The Starseed Transmissions*. The book consists of a series of writings from a higher part of himself that began to come through Ken after he had spent seven years in a cabin with his family without television, radio, magazines or newspapers. This was prior to the days of internet. In this time, without all of the usual outside distractions most of us take for granted, Ken had learned to listen to an inner voice, an inner dialogue. In time this provided the basis for a series of inspiring books Ken Carey was to write.

The Starseed Transmissions was the first of a trilogy. Later I was to read the other volumes. I noticed that each successive book reflected the author's growing self-awareness. Nevertheless, this first book left a lasting impression on me.

Ken Carey's experience without media interference proved to be an inspiration to me. I intended to do something similar in the years to come. I had seen how inaccurate the reporting of the 1984 highjacking had been. I'm not at all convinced that we all need to read, hear and see the unfolding 'soap opera' on the world stage that we call the daily news. It is worthwhile to have knowledge of our world and our times, but it is also extremely valuable to temper this knowledge with an inner awareness and the ability to see what is happening in a broader historical context. Then, instead of feeling helpless and victimized by the seemingly uncontrollable events around us, we find ways and means to act constructively in creating a more peaceful world.

The other little book Rose shared with me, *The Impersonal Life*, had very few words except 'Be still—and know—I AM—God.' This message I too carry with me to this day.

Before parting, Rose and I had one more visit to make together in New Delhi to see Ron Klein, an American peace organizer I had met in the Hunza. Ron was staying in the ashram of an Indian Master, Sant Darshan Singh. This saintly man presided over a mission called Sant Mat, a mystical branch of Islam. He had a vast following.

We joined Ron in the Ashram on a day when Sant Darshan Singh was due to make a public discourse. There were thousands in attendance. After listening to his untranslated address, the three of us retreated to Ron's quarters, a spare but neat room with the Indian luxury of an attached bathroom. Ron explained his work of helping organize the 13th Human Unity Conference, sponsored by the World Council on Religions for Peace (India). Ron spoke of his meetings with various spiritual leaders including the Dalai Lama, who was to lead a meditation that was to be broadcast worldwide from the Baha'i temple in Delhi. There were many other events during the week long conference, sponsored by different religions. The idea was to unite all world religions and people with a single common goal: A Prayer for Peace.

It seemed a noble goal and this was, indeed, an appropriate place for Ron to work since the motto of the Ashram, posted on several signs, was:

Be Good. Do Good. Be One.

Goodbye to India

After saying goodbye to Rose I had some loose ends to clean up. One of these was to post some mail. Anyone who has visited a big city in India knows that posting mail can be a trying process. There are often long queues and these move exceedingly slowly. It was on this one trip to the post office in Delhi that I made an accidental discovery.

I was continuing with my silent fasting days. One of these happened to coincide with the day I was due to post some mail. I walked into the large post office and was dismayed to see the usual long queues. I was dressed all in white and I had my little

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board and pencil suspended from my neck for when the time came to communicate with the postal employees. One of these men saw me as I entered the building and his eyes lit up. He must have thought I was a saddhu or a wandering holy man. He motioned for me to come to the front of the queue. He asked what I wanted and I dutifully wrote it down on my little board and showed him. He helped me immediately. I was out of the post office in less than five minutes. It is the perception of many people in India that one gains merit by helping a saddhu. I hope this postal employee gained a little merit in assisting me. I determined that I would dress in white and pretend I couldn't speak the next time I was dealing with Indian bureaucracy!

There is one experience I would like to share that happened before I moved on from Delhi. One typically hot morning I was walking leisurely across the green park-like expanse that sits in the middle of Connaught Circus. This was an area where it was not unusual to be approached by beggars or by someone with dubious looking instruments offering to clean your ears. I kept my ears to myself. This morning I was approached by an Indian man in ragged clothing whom I took to be a beggar. I reached into my money belt to extract a few coins. This man, with long tangled hair and an extraordinarily kind expression, motioned with his hands and with his facial expression that he didn't want any money. He smiled up at me and placed one hand briefly on my heart, and then on the area between my eyebrows. His touch was so gentle and his look so compelling that I didn't resist in any way. I simply smiled back at him, and wondered what he was up to. I felt in no way threatened. He handed me a flower and then brought his hands together at his heart in that Indian expression of respect. Still his lips registered no sound. I returned his gesture and quietly said, "Namaste." He turned and walked away and I did the same. I looked down at the flower, thought of this spontaneous meeting and realized that I would like to express my thanks again to this man. I turned to say something to him and he had vanished! I was surprised and not surprised at once. This was a big open green area with people walking in all directions but my mute visitor was nowhere to be seen. He and I had only turned from each other a moment before. Where had he gone? I still wonder today and I still feel blessed by the encounter.

I caught a train for the 400 kilometer trip to Ajmer in Rajasthan and used local transport to reach Pushkar, a short distance away. Here I settled into simple, one room lodgings quite literally perched over Pushkar Lake, which is considered sacred like Lake Manosarovar in Tibet. Pushkar has become a place of Hindu pilgrimage because of this holy lake. Legend has it that the lake was consecrated to Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe, when a lotus dropped from his hand into the vale and a lake emerged in that place. The picturesque lake is encircled by 500 temples and 52 palaces. Most of the structures are painted a pristine white. Devotees could be seen taking dips in the water of the lake which is said to have miraculous powers.

My time there started uneventfully enough. I met a German woman, Hilda, I had seen before in Pakistan and we shared a couple of meals in the alluring lakeside settlement. Then, out of the blue, I was struck down with severe fever. This time the fever lasted three straight days, during which time I lay on my bed and drank water. Occasionally I glanced out my window across the healing waters of the lake, the low white buildings reflected on its glass-like surface. It really was a beautiful place, but my fever-weary eyes were having difficulty appreciating the beauty. I decided that it was time for me to get out of India. I was sure that the unsanitary conditions were affecting my health. So, when I regained enough strength to move, I checked out of my room, took a bus back to Ajmer and booked onto a train bound for Bombay. I had to go First Class; the rest of the train was booked solid. Under the circumstances, owing to my fragile condition, this was an appropriate decision.

From Bombay I flew to Africa. My plan was to visit Dean's family and decide if South Africa was a place for me to learn more about growing food and living self sufficiently.



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An Unscheduled Trim

Malawi, November, 1988.

“**Y**ou’re going to have to cut your hair.”
I had just flown into Malawi after a brief stop in Nairobi. The immigration officer gave me a stern, uncompromising look. I thought I didn’t understand what he said. The African accented English was delightful but quite different from the Indian English I had been around for most of the last eleven months.

“I’m sorry. I don’t understand,” I said.

“My country’s policy is that no hair can be longer than the top of your shoulders.”

“But, but ...”

I had begun to grow my hair while in Pakistan and I was proudly sporting my first ever ponytail.

He handed me a pair of huge, dull and rusty scissors and stated adamantly, “You either cut your hair or you have to fly out of the country immediately.” He forgot to say, “Welcome to Malawi. Have a nice day.”

I was in Malawi only because I had been unable to get a visa for South Africa in Bombay. I was told that this was due to South Africa’s apartheid policy and the mistreatment of Indian nationals and their descendants in South Africa. If I wished to continue on to South Africa I would have to stay in Malawi long enough to procure a South African visa. This left me little choice so I retreated to the men’s room and proceeded to roughly cut my hair to shoulder length with the dull scissors. I was to find out later

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that this policy was a holdover from the days when hippies traveled through Africa with drugs. I couldn't quite grasp the logic in cutting my hair to minimize the risk of drug trafficking.

I exchanged some money. I was absolutely shocked at the prices quoted for taxis in to the city. I suppose after India, any prices seemed high. I had no idea how far the city was from here. The airport sat in the middle of an expansive savannah. One four lane tar road led off into the distance. There was no city in sight. Nevertheless, I decided to hitchhike into town. I stood on the side of the road, buffeted by a hot, dry unpleasant wind. The midday sun was intense. Car after car zoomed by. I hadn't seen a truly friendly face since my arrival in the country. I hadn't seen another Westerner. Welcome to Malawi!

I had no travel guide, but I was used to winging it. I would have to rely on the advice and generosity of the local people. I waited, and I waited. Welcome to Malawi.

Two hours later I was dropped off in front of what I was told was a traveler's hostel. It was an ugly single story cinder block structure. All but one of the windows I could see were broken. The place was filthy. I was directed to a small square room with a single wire bed and mattress. There was one shared toilet down the hall, also filthy. There was no kitchen. Fortunately I found a nearby store where I could buy some food. I say fortunately because this was a residential area with only a couple of very small shops. I wondered where I was and what I was doing here. After my long day of flying and the hours it took to locate this hovel, I was more than ready for sleep. I reckoned I hadn't slept in 24 hours.

Darkness snuck up like a burglar. The oppressive heat remained. And the noise began. It seems this was an activity center for the local community. The rooms were probably there for overindulgent party goers to sleep it off. That would explain why there was no kitchen. I put my ear plugs in and tried to fall asleep.

ZZZ.

Oh no, I thought. Not mosquitoes.

ZZZ.

I had given away my mosquito net before leaving India. I turned the light on. To my horror the room was filled with small

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black mosquitoes. I immediately turned the light out. I didn't want to attract any more of the critters. The broken window was like an open gate to a herd of stampeding elephants. It was too hot to warrant using my sleeping bag, and my sleeping sheet afforded little protection against these bloodthirsty kamikaze mozzies.

Somehow I got through the night, which seemed to last an eternity. I don't think I slept at all. I sweated like a stuffed pig inside my sleeping bag, figuring sweat to be preferable to hundreds of itchy bites. The mosquitoes went into hiding with the coming of dawn. I managed to find the South African Consulate and was told to return in two days for my visa. That, at least, was easy.

I now created a makeshift mosquito net out of my sleeping sheet and most of my clothes all held together with clothespins. I was proud of my creation that looked like a five-year-old's first attempt at sewing. At least it added a little color to the room. As night fell I settled into my protective den confident I was safe from the renegade Malawi mozzies.

Wrong. As I adjusted the clothespins to repair a breach in my defenses another brigade would storm in through another tiny opening. The night wore tediously on. I sweated and I swatted. I adjusted my defenses. I won some battles but the war was lost.

Morning came. I struggled out of bed, feeling as if I had been run over by a truck. I was exhausted, lonely, lost and disoriented. It wasn't my conscious intention to dabble in experiments with sleep deprivation. Is this what it meant to lose your mind? I simply could not think clearly. Why was this happening; this Malawi misery?

Enough! I walked to a travel agent, told him my story in brief and asked about the first available flights to Europe. At this point I wasn't particular about where within Europe, as long as it was some country north of the African continent.

"There is a flight to Zurich tomorrow. Will that be good for you?"

"Yes. Book me a seat please. Can you tell me where I can find a decent hotel?"

He made a couple of calls and before I could say 'Malawi mozzie' I was in a taxi cruising comfortably to an up market hotel in the embassy section of the city; so different from where I had

spent the last two nights, it may as well have been another country. I checked in at midday, had a restaurant meal, lay down on the queen-size bed, and was asleep before my head hit the pillow. I slept 16 hours straight, showered off the grime of India and Africa, and was soon sitting in comfort on a jet heading for Switzerland. I carried a souvenir from Africa—a new valid South African visa in my passport.

When all else fails, change your plans.

Five Element Bread

Germany, November, 1988.

"I'll pick you up at the train station in Tübingen." Those were Evy's words when I called her from Zurich before boarding the train for Germany. It was an emotional trip. Second class on a train in Switzerland is like first class in India. I couldn't take my eyes off the landscape. Everywhere I looked I saw green. It was an incredible contrast to the baked parchment of the Indian subcontinent, and the savannah of Africa.

There was something else I was feeling. I had just completed eleven months of intense experience and learning in the Himalayas. I loved it and I came away a new man. I was thinner than I had ever been, almost emaciated, and still relatively weak physically. But there was a new awareness, and a new purpose and direction in my life. I knew I was aimed for Santa Fe but it felt right to be in Europe. I looked forward to reconnecting with some of the friends I had met during my travels.

There was also a distinct feeling of relief. It was as though I knew I was completing an important chapter in my life. And with that completion came the delicious anticipation of new beginnings.

"Hi. John."

"Hi Evy. It's great to see you."

She was on her bike. I was to see this several times in Europe. People often picked me up with a bicycle rather than with a car.

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Evy looked and acted differently from the person who had helped me so much during my appendicitis debacle in southern China. She was withdrawn and somewhat uncommunicative. I wondered what was wrong. Tübingen is an old university town blessed with an abundance of forested areas. As we pushed the bike through the attractive wooded streets to her apartment I asked, "What's the matter. You seem restless."

"Oh," she said. "I'm having difficulty with one of my roommates. She doesn't respect me."

Before long we had arrived in the older second floor apartment. I stowed my gear in a tiny spare room where I could sleep on the floor.

I found Evy in the kitchen.

"Shall I show you how to make bread?" Evy asked.

"Yes," I responded. "Funny you should ask because I wrote that down in my journal as a goal just before leaving India. I wrote: *Learn how to bake whole grain bread.*"

She showed me how to dissolve some yeast in warm water and then to place the yeast water in a depression she made in a bowl of flour. She used whole grain flour that looked different from the whole grain wheat flour used to make chapattis in India.

"What kind of flour is that?" I asked.

"I believe it's called spelt in English. We call it dinkel. It's an ancient grain, sort of like the ancestor of wheat. It is said to give you more vitality than wheat and some say it has more vitamins and minerals than any other grain."

I wondered why I had never heard of it. This wondering is a pattern that continues to this day. There is always something new I haven't heard of.

The exercise of kneading the dough was enjoyable. We prepared the remainder of the meal while waiting for the dough to rise.

"What kind of sprouts are those?" I asked, pointing to the tiny, round yellow germinating seeds in a three tiered plastic sprouter.

"Millet," Evy replied. "It's easy to sprout and it's an earth element, being yellow."

"What do you mean by element?" I asked, confused.

“My girlfriend and I have been studying a way of preparing food based on the Chinese system of five elements. Let me show you.”

She handed me a paper with five columns of words in German.

“This looks Chinese to me,” I kidded.

She laughed. “It’s actually in German. If you like I can help you translate it into English. See these five words across the top, these are the elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. Each element has an associated color, taste, and season. If we prepare our meals by adding ingredients in this order of elements it seems to enhance the flavor and energy of the food. This energy is passed on to us when we eat it.”

I was swept up by her enthusiasm and went on to prepare some vegetables on the stovetop in this way.

“See,” Evy continued. “This oil corresponds to the Earth Element; so do these carrots. Then we add the white part of the leeks because they are the Metal Element. Next comes water. Here we could add salt if we wanted. Next comes wood which is green so I’ll put in these Chinese greens and the green part of the leeks here. And on it goes. It’s a circle.”

I liked this. By concentrating on the elements an order seemed to be made out of color and taste.

“Now it’s time for the Fire Element which is red. But also included here are certain seeds like fenkel (fennel) and anise which I’ll add now.”

The proof was in the pudding. Everything was delicious when we sat down to eat. What makes a good cook or gardener or mechanic? Attention. Developing a skill requires some basic guidelines and practice. Mastery requires focus and attention. The love part, well, that’s up to the individual.

Over the next couple of days, using a dictionary and Evy’s assistance, I translated the five element chart. Today, nearly two decades later, I continue to combine foods in this way.

Another Serendipitous Meeting

I had been observing Evy and listening to her complaints about her roommate. I met this person and I watched the dynamics of the two of them. It was pretty obvious to me that Evy was simply having a hard time with herself. She was under pressure with her studies and had difficulties with her mother. She was projecting her internal problems onto her roommate. She began to do the same with me, so I decided not to stay long. I called Marc Pierre and he immediately invited me to stay with him in Bonn.

“There’s a popular song on the radio that I hope you get a chance to hear,” Evy said.

“What’s that?” I asked. After nearly five years overseas I was totally out of touch with the radio.

“Bobby McFerrin’s *Don’t Worry, Be Happy*. It seems to fit with what you keep saying.”

“I see what you mean. I like the name of the song. It says it all.”

Evy and I were walking through a forest of large bare deciduous trees. I noticed how orderly the planting looked. This was a forest planted by man and it was a pattern I was to see replicated throughout Germany and the Netherlands. There wasn’t much land left untouched for nature.

“Would you like to go to our weekly market in the town center? It’s tomorrow,” Evy asked.

“Yes,” I enthused. It didn’t take much to convince me. I love markets. “Evy. Where will I stand to start hitchhiking to Bonn?”

“I don’t know, John. We’ll look at the Tübingen map back at my flat.”

We looked at the map when we returned to her apartment. Evy was unsure of where I should start and so was her roommate. That was understandable. Neither of them drove. Most of their travel was by train, and neither of them had hitchhiked before.

I didn’t worry. It felt like I was in the flow again after my temporary uncomfortable diversion in Africa.

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"Evy, I know that woman!" I exclaimed. I excitedly pointed to a tall young woman with long auburn hair. We were walking through the market purchasing fresh vegetables. It was Hilda, with whom I had shared a grueling minibus trip from Gilgit to Islamabad and then met again in Pushkar before my serious fever. I could hardly believe I would see her here.

"Hello, Hilda," I called, walking over to her.

"Hello, John," she enthused. "What are you doing here?" She looked a little startled. That made two of us.

"I'm visiting Evy." I introduced them to each other. "What are you doing here?" The question seemed a little unfair. After all, she was German.

"I'm visiting my family here. I am going to my home in Bonn tomorrow by bus," she said, in her superb English. It seemed that nearly all of the Europeans I met while traveling spoke exceptional English. They put us native English speakers to shame in most cases.

"What a coincidence," I laughed, glancing at Evy. "I'm heading to Bonn tomorrow as well, only I'm hitchhiking. Would you happen to know the best place for me to stand to catch a lift?"

"Sure. I've hitchhiked from there as well in the past myself." She explained the location to Evy and we arranged to meet each other over a cup of tea in Bonn.

Again I was astounded at the improbable synchronicities that continued to occur with heartening frequency. I felt completely guided and protected, like a baby in the arms of its mother. Everything I needed to know was effortlessly revealed to me.

Reunion in Bonn

It was surprisingly easy to get lifts the next day. I phoned Marc Pierre from the center of Bonn where I had been dropped off. Like Evy, Marc Pierre came by bicycle to pick me up. It was great to see him. He explained that he was house-sitting for a friend who had a spacious two bedroom apartment. We walked there together, where I met Marc Pierre's lovely girlfriend, Jing. Jing's father had been a well known author and lecturer who had been forced to go

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underground to flee Mao's oppressive rule. Jing was in Germany to continue her language studies at the same university as Marc Pierre. Her English and German were both excellent.

My stay with them was less than a week but in that time Marc Pierre went out of his way to give me a flavor of Bonn, capital of West Germany since World War II. One afternoon, November 11th to be exact, we were downtown while scores of children descended on an old church carrying lanterns of their own making to commemorate Saint Martin's Day. Another evening we attended a candlelit gathering at the university to mark the 50th anniversary of the Jewish pogrom in Germany. Very few attended. Of those that did, there was a shockingly high anti-Semitic response to the Jewish university students who were speaking.

"I'm horrified at the anti-Semitic sentiment," I expressed to Marc Pierre.

"It's not nice, is it? Tomorrow I will show you something else related to that."

The next day we walked along a wide residential street with solidly built attached housing, and Marc Pierre pointed out houses displaying flags indicating the residents were Nazis.

"I had no idea," I said to him as we walked quickly through the area.

"Amazing, isn't it?" agreed Marc Pierre. "If anything, Nazism is growing."

He should have known. He was studying politics.

Another day Marc Pierre and I took the train to Köln and visited the beautiful cathedral I had only given a cursory look when visiting years before on my European bus-camping trip. I had been 'cathedrally out' during that trip. This time, after climbing the church tower for the view, and the exercise, I might add, we attended an afternoon service accompanied by outstanding choral music surely enhanced by the amazing acoustics of the cavernous cathedral. We were both deeply moved.

On the return trip to Bonn I couldn't help but notice the huge number of garden plots on both sides of the track, available for city people living on small sections or in apartments. The plots were neatly tended and vibrant with cold hardy crops such as cabbage and leeks.

I took advantage of the bathtub in the apartment to luxuriate in an apple cider vinegar bath one afternoon. Shirley MacLaine had spoken of the healing benefits of such a bath in one of her books. I continued to practice the five element method of food preparation in making meals for Marc Pierre, Jing and myself.

I was determined to continue with silent fast days, so Marc Pierre lent me his studio apartment for this. It was a cozy tiny box filled with books, a built-in desk and a single bed. After my silent day of fasting I woke up and sat at the desk to update my journal. Poetry began to write itself through me. I had never had that experience before and had never written poetry before. I reckoned the fasting and silence must have opened creative channels in me. Perhaps with the cessation of outer chatter a purer inner dialogue is allowed to emerge.

One day Marc Pierre asked, "Would you like to go to Moscow with us?"

"Yes," I replied. "I've wanted to visit there for years. But I have already arranged to visit Lucia soon." Lucia had called the previous day in response to a letter I'd sent from Tubingen.

"No worries mate," Marc Pierre quipped in a less than authentic Aussie accent. "I'll arrange the trip for December."

In the meantime, Marc Pierre organized for me to stay with his mother and stepfather in Hanover. After hitchhiking to Hanover I nestled into the spare room of their second floor apartment. There was just enough space for my morning yoga routine. I prepared five element spelt bread for this lovely couple. Hans worked in the Hanover airport and was proud of his pet parakeet. Each morning I walked through fresh snow to an isolated bench in a nearby park to do my toning. It wasn't isolated enough. One morning I opened my eyes to see a whole group of park visitors watching me. I gave them a little wave, closed my eyes, and continued toning. I didn't know any of them, so why worry?

After a few days, I attempted unsuccessfully to hitchhike to Jurgen's place in Oldenburg. I called Jurgen and he suggested I take the train to Bremen, where he would pick me up. Hans drove me to the station when he got home from work. I purchased a ticket for Bremen and boarded the train. It was time for a reunion with an unusual theoretical physicist.



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Sweat Lodge and Angels' Song

Jurgen and his partner Moni picked me up (in a car) from the Bremen train station.

"I hope you don't mind. We're going straight to a sweat lodge," stated Jurgen as he placed my backpack in the boot.

This came as a bit of a shock. I am a morning person. It is not uncommon for me to be in bed by 9.30 pm or earlier. It was already dark. But part of traveling is going with flow. In our short time together in India, Jurgen had introduced me to a multitude of new concepts. It looked like I was to be back in school with him again. The car's wipers worked vigorously to keep the rain off the windows, and the lights cut an eerie, tear-stained path through the dark country lanes.

"In the Native American tradition there is one sweat lodge for men and one for women; but tonight we are being guided by a German Sufi master, so the sweat lodge is for men and women together," explained Jurgen.

"Razi is quite a wise man," added Moni. "He is a teacher for us."

I wondered what I was getting into. We pulled up to a large two storey farmhouse and ran through the rain before entering an open-plan room that took up most of the ground floor. A few men and women were conversing in clusters throughout the room. I was introduced to Razi, an average sized man in his thirties, standing by a blazing pot belly stove. I didn't see any trappings such as moustache or special hat that might identify him as a Sufi master. He took my hand warmly and asked in a soft, clear voice, "Have you done a sweat lodge before?"

"No," I replied.

"As you probably know, the sweat lodge originates with Native Americans. They would have used animal hides over a curved willow frame. This was a totally portable structure which the people carried with them as they moved about during the year. Our lodge is also made of willow branches but it is covered with old blankets and tarpaulins."

I hoped the old blankets would prove to be watertight. It was a wet night.

Razi continued, "The structure has only one entrance that faces east. Outside the entrance we have built a fire in which we heat rocks for inside the sweat lodge. We will go in and out of the lodge four times during the night, honoring each of the four directions. Each sitting has a different theme or focus. People will sometimes be encouraged to talk and they will mostly do that in German but I will explain throughout the night to you in English."

"Thanks," I said, genuinely grateful.

He handed me a thick, blue terry cloth bathrobe, "You can take your clothes off in the bathroom and put this on. We are about to begin."

We walked as a small group of about eight out the back door. The rain had diminished to a sympathetic drizzle. The light of a full moon half-heartedly attempted to penetrate the mist. With the aid of a couple of flashlights we padded barefoot through an open woodland of bare deciduous trees. The nakedness of the trees mirrored the nakedness of this clutch of human participants, ready to engage in a timeless ritual. In my case I can't say I was ready. 'Open' might be a more appropriate term. I was swept up in circumstances that I could either awkwardly resist or gracefully accept. I chose the path of least resistance, acceptance. We approached a fire being tended by a crouching man in a raincoat. Beside the fire rose the small dome of the sweat lodge, like an oversized tortoise shell resting upon the earth. It appeared to be far too low and too small for all of us.

Razi said a prayer, and we shed our robes and stooped to enter. I was last, following Moni into the gloom. The only light came through the opening where Razi sat, an attenuated mix of fire and moonlight. The first people to have entered had gone clockwise round a central pit to the far side. We sat on half bales of hay. The

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sides of the lodge curved in so quickly that I had to crouch with my head practically between my knees. It was not a comfortable posture. The fire-keeper brought the last of the fire-roasted stones balanced precariously on two sticks and placed them in the central pit. He then took up the last place on the bale to my right. Razi closed the flap and we were instantly pitched into near absolute darkness. This suited me as it hid my embarrassment at being naked in mixed company. Razi drizzled water from a bucket at his side onto the stones, causing steam to permeate the already claustrophobic breathing space. I willed myself to remain calm and avoid an asthmatic reaction to the stifling conditions. Still, I struggled to breathe, and sensed the night was going to be more about endurance than enjoyment.

Razi began to chant, '*La illaha illallah.*' I was familiar with this mantra from my time spent in the Middle East. This is the beginning of the Muslim call to prayer. I believe it means, "There is only one God but God." One by one we all began to chant until our voices fused into a collective circular chorus of raw power. Time stood still. My legs and tummy cramped, but I was determined to see this thing through. The chanting subsided and all was still save for the muted breathing of eight sweating bodies and the burst of steam that arose each time Razi ladled water on the stones.

What a relief it was when Razi opened the flap. We stumbled out and stretched our contracted limbs. I quickly emptied a glass of water and stood by the fire, conversing in muted tones with other participants, like monks and nuns in a vestry. The penetrating dampness gradually chilled my body to the point where I was actually looking forward to the next round of sweating. In due course, reheated stones were placed in the pit and we entered the lodge again.

So passed the night. Bent over and sweating, I only half listened as people spoke mostly in German. Razi did his best to include me by giving instructions in English. Emotions, initially verbally expressed, gave way to sobs and cries, as men and women used the safe environment to release feelings normally repressed. I looked forward to being able to stand up and stretch during breaks. Some people only went into the sweat lodge once or twice. I left the lodge early during the fourth and final round.

Only Razi, Jurgen and one woman made it to the end. I joined Moni and others in the house, washing and dressing. I was already snoozing in the back of the car as Jurgen drove us to their apartment in Oldenburg. Most of the night was gone when I slipped into the single bed in their spare bedroom.

The next morning Moni encouraged me to take a bath. *Did I smell that bad?* I have rarely enjoyed a bath more. By the time I came out I was rejuvenated. All fatigue from the nearly sleepless night had vanished. I must say that I have never felt as purified from the inside out as I did after that sweat lodge. It seemed as if every pore and cell in my body had been purged of a lifetime of residues and toxins. I felt light, fresh, and crystal clean, as I imagine a newborn baby would feel before taking on the dross of this material world.

Jurgen lived and breathed theoretical physics, but if there is such a thing as a typical theoretical physicist, Jurgen wasn't it. He was as keen to talk about Agni Hotra and telepathy as he was to discuss the theories of Einstein and Bohm. For Jurgen, Agni Hotra was a precise science involving sound, timing, and form to affect matter and purify the atmosphere. In addition, as he explained to me, Jurgen distinctly felt the effects of the process in his own body. Jurgen was far from the narrow-minded compartmentalized scientist Fritjof Capra spoke of in *The Turning Point*. Some have predicted that science and spirituality will merge in the twenty-first century. These two disciplines had already met in this bearded deep thinking German in the late 1980s.

Jurgen was fascinated by my statement, supported by the inner experience in the Green Hotel, that time was not linear. My premise was that if we did lead other lives, these lives did not follow each other in sequential historical order, as the doctrine of reincarnation implies. In reality, there is no time at all, and in this subjective world all lives occur simultaneously. Hence, a present nobly lived influences not only the future but the past. In reality there is nothing but Now. As difficult as this was for many to understand, discussions that Jurgen had with other theoretical physicists headed in this direction. He asked me to give a talk about this to a group of university colleagues, which I did.

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Jurgen and Moni slept on a cluster of sheepskins in the middle of their double bedroom. Jurgen would leave for the university early and I would join Moni in performing the sunrise Agni Hotra ceremony using the same pyramidal copper pot Jurgen had used in my room in the Green Hotel in August. After chanting specific mantras at the exact moment of sunrise, Moni and I would sit together in silent meditation. Moni was a sensitive and visual person. One morning she described a vision she received during meditation of steeply pitched glass pyramids. She felt that she and I had met in a place where these pyramids were found. Another day, while sitting down to lunch with Jurgen and me, Moni was deeply distressed while describing a vision from that morning, of being burned at the stake as a witch. Precisely at the moment of relating this gruesome vision to us, the phone rang. When Moni returned from the call after ten minutes she was in tears.

“What’s the matter?” asked Jurgen.

“That was my parents on the telephone. They said they will not accept my decision to change my name after my separation from my ex husband. They say they are right now cutting off communication with me because of that.”

“I don’t mean to sound insensitive Moni, but can you see how this fits with the theory of time being non-linear?” I asserted excitedly. “Just as you talk of a life in which you are burned at the stake, your parents call to figuratively burn you at the stake in your present life. Each life is occurring simultaneously and what happens in one life affects all other lives. Everything is connected. You’ve been given a rare glimpse at a life in which you are being tried as a witch and you can see how it is connected with what is happening here and now.”

Jurgen grinned. He understood. I think Moni did as well. She just needed a little time to get past the emotionality of what she was experiencing.

I woke early each morning and did my yoga set in the living room before joining Moni for our sunrise Agni Hotra meditation. I lay in bed in the dark in those early hours, probably between 4.00 am and 4.30 am. Each predawn I would listen to an angelic choir singing the most beautiful harmonic vocals I have ever heard. This lasted at least half an hour and it occurred every morning during my stay with Jurgen and Moni. I was usually enthusiastic about

my early yoga routine but, I must say, I was reluctant to get up and chance interrupting this heavenly choir. The voices were, quite literally, out of this world. I have never in my life, before or since, heard anything at all close to as beautiful as this. The sound was so profound and so melodious that it seemed to stir some deep musical memory in me. After a few mornings of this I broached the subject with Jurgen and Moni. They weren't hearing the choir and they never had. I surmised that the choir was responding to all the positive vibrations being released in the house through the Agni Hotra practices. I also wondered if the sweat lodge had triggered an inner ear opening in me. As I said earlier, I have never felt so 'clean' as I did at that time.

On the weekend Moni's lovely eight-year-old daughter stayed with us. We went for a drive in the countryside and ended up in deserted stone church, where, at Jurgen's urging, I led them all in vowel tone chanting. This journey with sound continued.

One day I joined Jurgen in the university library. There was a video he wanted me to see based on the life of Masonobu Fukuoka. This Japanese scientist and farmer had developed a revolutionary no-dig crop rotation involving rice, barley and clover. It all depended on sowing and mulching at precisely the right time related to the weather and seasons. It was an ingenious and effective approach that had already drawn many Westerners to Fukuoka's farm to witness and participate in.

"Sit down and listen to this tape, John," suggested Jurgen. We were relaxing in the lounge after our evening meal. "This is a recording I made in the Baha'i Temple in New Delhi," he continued. "Have you been there?"

"No," I admitted. "But I have a friend in Delhi who is helping organize a peace prayer day in that temple."

"It is an amazing new building in the form of a lotus with 27 free-standing marble clad 'petals'. It is truly inspired construction designed by an Indian architect."

I regretted not having visited this temple while staying in Delhi.

Jurgen continued, "People are free to read from the holy book of their choosing."

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The recording quality was far from professional, but the cavernous resonance of the temple amplified the voices of the readers of scriptures from many traditions and religions. It was touching stuff.

“Can you tell me more about the Baha’i religion, Jorgen? I recall visiting the prison in Israel where the founder, Bahá’u’lláh, had been incarcerated. But I don’t remember much else.”

As usual Jorgen proved to be remarkably well informed. He responded at length: “At the foundation of Baha’i teaching is something called ‘progressive revelation’. From one source, God, come ‘Manifestations of God’. Roughly every 500 to 1,000 years a Manifestation appears representing a successive stage in the spiritual evolution of humankind.”

“When you say Manifestation do you mean Prophet?”

“Yes. Religions are formed based on the teachings of these Manifestations. In approximately 3000 BC Krishna appeared and taught of the spirit. One thousand years later Abraham emerged and spoke of obedience. This chain of progression followed through Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, and Christ, who, of course, was the embodiment of love. In AD 632 Mohammed began his ministry. He prophesied that two messengers would follow him. When Bahá’u’lláh declared Himself as the Promised One of all ages in 1863 he had followed the previous Manifestation, or Prophet as you would say, the Báb, by only 19 years. This is said to be the first time in history that two major Manifestations of God have arisen so close together in time.”

“Was the Báb to Bahá’u’lláh what John the Baptist was to Jesus?”

“More or less. His name, translated, means ‘The Gate’.”

“What happened to him?”

“As you know, Prophets have nearly always been made to suffer by the ignorance of man. The Báb was martyred at Shiraz in Persia. He was 31. His story is quite remarkable. He was tied up before a firing squad. It is said that 750 armed soldiers were unable to kill him until he was satisfied that he had finished his last recitation to his secretary.”

“What about Bahá’u’lláh?”

“Bahá’u’lláh wasn’t martyred but he didn’t exactly have an easy time. He was scourged, stoned, imprisoned in a filthy

dungeon and exiled for close to 40 years. By the time he died in the late 1800s near Akka in Palestine, or what is today called Israel, he was responsible for more than 100 volumes of writings.

“Bahá’u’lláh’s vision was nothing less than the unity of humanity as one people and of the earth as a common homeland. That is why, I suppose, that people from any religion are allowed to read from their holy books in Baha’i temples.”

“That reminds me of Mahatma Gandhi speaking of going to the Hindu temple when he was growing up,” I said. “He described how the priests would freely switch back and forth between the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Qur’an of Islam.”

“Yes. But Bahá’u’lláh went further. He encouraged new systems of governance based on cooperation rather than competition. He abolished the institution of the clergy and encouraged every individual to make an unfettered search for truth. He is recognized by millions of followers worldwide as the Divine Teacher of this age.”

Jurgen drove me to the edge of the city and, from there, on a cool gray day, I hitchhiked to the Dutch border near Groningen. It was a Friday and many students were hitching home for the weekend. I decided it would be best to take the train. It was time for a reunion with Lucia.



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From Friendship to Love

When I called Lucia before leaving Germany she told me she wouldn't be home from her Friday night yoga teacher training until at least 10.30 pm. It was already dark by the time my train reached Amsterdam Central Station. I walked into an office and, with the help of a friendly clerk, located Lucia's street on a wall map. I was then directed to the appropriate tram. I sat near the tram driver to make sure I got off at the right stop. After disembarking, I found a lively pub where I was given clear directions to Lucia's street. It was nearly 11.00 pm when Lucia answered my insistent ring. She said she had just returned home from her class.

It was so good to see her. Her third floor apartment was open-plan with a tiny kitchen and a single small bedroom. I helped Lucia put a double mattress down on the living room floor for me. I was soon sound asleep.

Friendship. No road is lonely in good company. Lucia and I were soon engaged in conversations that resumed where our last ones left off in India. Life took on a full but not overfull quality. Lucia was teaching four weekly yoga classes in her spacious and sparsely furnished living area. There was room for intimate classes of up to 7 or 8 students. One of these classes was for seniors including Lucia's lively and enthusiastic mother and Tante Rie, a close family friend.

Each morning began with Lucia and I doing our individual yoga routines. Each day finished with a shared meditation that was something Lucia was doing for forty consecutive days as part of her yoga teacher training. We shared long walks, sumptuous

salads, and stimulating dialogues. We visited the Rijks Museum and more than once bought fresh produce at the raucous and busy Albert Cuyp Market. I loved the way the vendors called out in loud friendly voices to entice passing shoppers to their stalls. We boiled chestnuts on the stovetop and listened to Lucia's records, finding out we had similar tastes in music. Our delicious, simple and healthy meals were shared while sitting on the floor near the 'fake fire' gas heater that Lucia told me was typical in non-centrally heated Dutch homes.

"Are you still determined to go to Santa Fe, John?" asked Lucia over one such meal.

"Yes," I replied. "I sense you are a little doubtful of my journey, Lucia. As I wrote to you when I was in the Hunza, the signs are still pointing me there."

"Oh. I guess I just want to hear from you how it works out when you get there."

"Have you ever been to America?" I asked.

"Yes. Not so long ago I visited California. I enjoyed that trip, but I must say that America is one place that has never really interested me."

"I have a feeling you will live there one day," I said.

"Oh, I don't know about that."

Our friendship ripened like fruit on the vine. There was an ease in our togetherness that was at once familiar and nurturing. Laughter echoed off the walls.

One day we took tram and train to visit a yoga teacher friend in Harlem. I met other friends of Lucia's when they attended her yoga classes. I baked bread and continued to experiment with five element food preparation. We visited Vondel Park, a large and lively Amsterdam oasis that attracted outdoor musicians and Frisbee players, joggers, walkers, and lovers.

The fruit of our friendship was ready for the picking. The last night of my stay we made love, an unplanned, natural and inevitable extension of our easeful intimacy. An inner bell rang sweetly and other-worldly as we held each other under the blankets. I felt a little shy and vulnerable—mindful of a deep step we had just taken beyond the platonic friendship we had shared until now.

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“Did you hear that, Lucia?” I whispered.

“You mean the bell that just rang?” she replied tenderly.

“Yes.”

“Yes, I did.”

Her head felt so comfortable resting on my chest. We were two souls, returned to each other in the physical, engaged in a cosmic dance as old as the human race, each of us enjoying the magic of the moment and unprepared to speak of a nearby future in which I was to leave. The next afternoon I was due to return to Germany for a rendezvous with Marc Pierre and Jing. We would travel to Moscow together from Berlin.

The following afternoon I did my best to get everything jammed into my bags. I always seemed to have just a little too much stuff relative to the size of my large backpack and daypack.

“You don’t look as disorganized as you did in Delhi, John,” Lucia quipped.

“Everything has a place. There just don’t seem to be enough places.” I laughed. “It’s fun this way. It adds a little excitement to the journey.”

“This may not fit, but I would like to give you this jacket to help with the cold in Moscow,” said Lucia, handing me a leather jacket.

“Thanks.” I was touched. “It doesn’t have to fit in a bag. I’ll wear it. Do you want it back later?”

“No. I have another jacket. You use it for as long as you like and then pass it on.”

“Well, I do appreciate that. My raincoat was fine in the tropics, but it hasn’t provided much warmth in Europe.”

“I’m happy to help you John.”

“Before I left Canada almost five years ago I put some things in storage like furniture, records, and books. I got rid of a lot of my jackets because I knew it would be inappropriate in Saudi Arabia. I have saved one white silk jacket for my wedding.”

“Oh,” said Lucia. She looked me in the eyes. “When is that going to be?”

“I don’t know. But I will be well dressed on the day. Then I can get rid of my last dress jacket.”

We sat together on the tram. I was actually packed and I felt warm in the leather coat. We arrived at Amsterdam Central Station where I was to meet the driver of the organized ride sharing that was to return me to Germany. A dark haired woman in her late twenties stood beside a car at the prearranged meeting location. As we approached on foot she called out, "Are you John?"

"Yes," I replied.

"I'm so sorry. My plans have changed. I won't be driving to Hanover until tomorrow evening," she said. I continued to be amazed at the incredibly fluent English most everyone I had met in Amsterdam spoke.

I glanced at Lucia. "That's fine. I think I can enjoy another day in Amsterdam."

"Good. I will meet you in the same place at the same time tomorrow."

Early the following afternoon Lucia and I sat on the floor over what was truly to be our last meal together on this ten day visit.

"I hope you are not upset over the delay in your trip to Germany," said Lucia.

I reached out and held her hands. "I feel we have been given a gift of one more special day together. I have absolutely no regrets."

"Don't you find it amazing that we were in New Zealand at the same time last year?"

"No more amazing than having met each other in McLeod Ganj earlier this year. A friendship like ours is so natural, so profound, that we would surely have met somewhere else if our paths hadn't crossed already in India."

I continued, "Lucia, I'm curious. When will you complete your yoga teacher training?"

"Next summer."

In a repeat of the previous day we once again made it to Central Station. The driver was there, as she had promised. Lucia and I hugged tightly. Something magic seemed to enfold us. Even without the accompaniment of celestial bells it was obvious that Lucia and I shared a special connection.

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In this five year period outside Canada I had made some good friends. I had also learned to say goodbye, over and over again, and moving on had always felt comfortable. This goodbye had a different quality. This farewell seemed to contain the seed of unexpressed possibilities.

In the course of the years I had lost touch with many of my old friends from Canada. Those who leave have a greater need for correspondence than those who remain behind, and many of my letters home were unanswered. In fairness, it would have proved difficult to track me down as I had seldom remained anywhere for too long. But I had gained a new kind of strength from my years away. I had met and made new friends easily, and I had just as easily moved on and said goodbye. In five years I had passed a lot of ships in the night.

Letting go of old friendships seemed a natural means of creating the space necessary for new ones. If you pour water into a full cup it overflows. A half full cup always has room for more.

“Have a great trip to Moscow, John, and do keep in touch,” said Lucia, looking into my eyes.

I returned that look and said, “You know I will write you, Lucia.” I wondered if Lucia was also thinking, as was I, of some sort of future together. She said nothing about this. Nor did I. Perhaps we were just cherishing each moment we had together. Surely a today well-lived will ensure the future of our dreams. This journey to New Mexico was my personal adventure. I think I needed to prove to Lucia that this was real and not just some fantasy, before we could entertain the possibility of a life together. I must say that I relished the idea of spending my life with a woman who had become my best friend.

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The Iron Curtain

“You’ll like Berlin. There’s no other city in Germany like it.” Hans’s parting words at the bus station in Hanover corroborated the opinions I had heard from several people I had met while traveling through Germany.

I looked forward to seeing friends I had met in McLeod Ganj. Stefan, a true Berliner, said he would live nowhere else in Europe. He was a classical guitarist with an effervescent personality housed in a compact, wiry frame topped with a perpetually grinning face and long, wild dark blonde hair. His partner, Sarah, a tall, brown-haired attractive New Zealander was, if it was possible, even more positive and bubbly than Stefan. Together they worked in a restaurant and saved for their next traveling adventure. Simultaneously, Stefan honed his already considerable musical skills with, in his words, ‘a true master guitar teacher.’

Berlin was an anomaly, belonging to two countries since the end of World War Two, when Germany was partitioned. Despite sitting squarely in East Germany, West Berlin was a part of West Germany, although it was no longer the capital. Bonn has taken over this function. Across the now famous (or infamous) Berlin Wall sat East Berlin, watched over by the military presence of America, Britain, the USSR and France, outdated insurance that the world would never experience another Third Reich.

To get to Berlin I had to endure a long bus trip from Hanover on a straight, tedious road through the hinterlands of East Germany. Everything was gray, from the northern European late autumn sky to the leafless trees, the empty, stubbled fields and the occasional polluted industrial town. The buildings were ill-kept

and seemingly caught in a 1940s time warp. Even the people looked gray with their dull outfits and pallid complexions. When I saw the Brandenburg sign on the roadside I had to wonder what part of this lackluster landscape had inspired Johan Sebastian Bach to compose his soaring Brandenburg concertos, still one of my favorite pieces of music. Bach and I share the same birthday, March 21, although he preceded me considerably. Our birth years offer an interesting juxtaposition of numbers, 1685 versus 1958.

West Berlin's generous rolling parklands and vibrant urban congestion came as a welcome respite from the monotony of the mostly flat monochromatic countryside.

My reunion with Stefan and Sarah was pleasant as they generously offered the couch in their cluttered, high-ceilinged living room to me. Over a five element pumpkin soup I had prepared, they regaled me with tales of their restaurant colleagues. Many of these colleagues were 'sanyasins', followers of Bhagwan Rajneesh.

Mark Pierre and Jing arrived a few days later. Mark Pierre accompanied me on a walking tour of the part of East Berlin that could be reached from the point where we had left the underground.

Forbidden Faith and the KGB

The following day the three of us joined a tour group and flew from East Berlin to Moscow's Sheremetevo Airport. Seeing the snow-clad winter world, I was glad to have the jacket from Lucia and the jumper Mark Pierre had lent me a few weeks before. My Indian clothes just didn't stand up to a European winter. It wasn't difficult to discern why Muscovites wear thick coats and ushankas, their ever present fur hats.

On the bus from the airport I found a seat behind Mark Pierre and Jing, and beside one of the East German visitors. As we passed a giant billboard printed in the, to me unintelligible, Cyrillic script, my seatmate, who had until then been mute, leaned over and conspiratorially stated in English, "You see that word on the sign?"

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I nodded.

“That word is ‘Mira’. In Russian it has two meanings, ‘Peace’ and ‘Earth’.”

These proved to be the only words that my neighbor said to me on this trip to our hotel. I reflected on the quality of a language that gives this one word two such important meanings. Surely we all, deep down, wish for peace on Earth.

Our tour group checked into a huge hotel that was reserved for out-of-country visitors. Everything was comfortable enough, if a little outdated. Sometimes the lifts worked and sometimes they didn't. I shared a room with a tall, stocky East German businessman in his fifties. I asked him why he had come to Moscow.

He replied in heavily accented but fluent English, “I practically lived here for a few years in the early 1980s when setting up a subsidiary for my East German company. I only went home occasionally during that time and so I didn't see my wife very often. I fell in love with my Russian secretary. I have told the Russians that I am here on business now but really I am here to see my girlfriend. If this is anything like other visits I have made here recently, I will have to sneak around to see her and not alert the KGB. They think I am trying to take out trade secrets. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

I was glad he had confided in me. For the next two nights he left the hotel before dinner time and didn't return until the following morning. Each night, around 1.00 am, I would be awakened from a profound slumber by the ringing of the bedside telephone. A deep Russian voice would inquire if Mr. Schmidt was there. I would reply, “No,” and promptly fall back to sleep.

Early each morning as I was completing my yoga exercises, Mr. Schmidt would return, bleary eyed and ebullient.

“We managed to evade the KGB all night,” he would exclaim, and then promptly put his feet up on the bed and fall asleep. It was clearly a pleasant game for him.

On Sunday morning he asked me if I would like to accompany him to a nearby church.

“I have been there many times,” he said. “It is quite special. You will see.”

As we trudged through the snow, fresh soft flakes fell upon us, like a blessing from heaven. We arrived early for the service. We kept our coats on as there was no heating in the bleak, stone structure. I was surprised to see there were no pews. In ones and twos the faithful, all elderly and mostly female, shuffled in.

It was a Russian Orthodox Church and the two young priests in white cassocks waved burning sticks of incense while sonorously chanting the Latin service. I couldn't take my eyes off a painting of Jesus, suspended in anguish from the cross.

The priests droned on. The faithful, standing in their outdoor winter clothing, tottered softly from foot to foot, presumably to stay warm and awake. I was swept up in the great spirit of the place, more powerful than any I had previously experienced in a church. Tears began to stream down my face. There was no stopping them as I felt the presence of the Master, presumably pulled like a magnet to this frigid place by the warmth and the faith in the hearts of the handful of elderly parishioners.

Periodically, my East German friend would ask, "Do you want to go?" He was clearly nonplussed by my tears.

Each time he asked I would shake my head, unable to give more than a single word response. I simply stood in rapture with the torrents of tears continuing unabated for over half an hour. I have visited St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, St. Paul's in London, Notre Dame in Paris and, not long before, Köln's awesome cathedral, but it was here, in a tiny, unheated church in frigid Moscow, that I came to experience what true faith is.

I felt a gentle tug on my sleeve. It was the end of the service and the end of my unexpected reverie. We stepped out into the falling snow, and I left behind a religious experience I have never forgotten. In a frozen communist land, a few brave and dedicated souls had kept alive a faith that an unsympathetic regime could not totally suppress. I was touched. I still am. They say faith can move mountains. It can certainly open doors.

Our time in Moscow was full, with visits to the National Gallery and Red Square. We traveled on Moscow's famous underground to reach a market teeming with an eccentric mix of vendors who hailed from the far-flung corners of the Soviet Empire. Marc Pierre and I visited the cavernous central railway

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station and watched as the fabled Siberian Express rumbled off, steam billowing, for the six day journey to Vladivostok and the Orient.

One night we managed to watch the opera and here, after the dazzling performance, we met two friendly young Russians, Igor and Demetri. They spoke of the electronics business they wanted to set up when they had completed their military service. They invited us to join them for another performance the following evening and we gratefully accepted.

We met our two Russian friends the next night outside the hotel. For some reason they were not allowed in. They guided us to the location of the performance by way of the underground. We all enjoyed the humorous, modern play that was dramatically different from the opera of the previous night, but equally entertaining. These two truly friendly young men would not let us pay. I kept in postal contact with Demetri for some years afterwards. They did end up establishing a successful computer business.

I enjoyed my time in Moscow, full of the ridiculous and the sublime. The last morning, while my roommate slept off his nocturnal merrymaking, I sat down and composed a long letter to Lucia. I realized how much I missed her and I told her this in the letter. At that moment the aphorism, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder,' could not have been more accurate. I was in love and Lucia was the person I wanted to share my life and my dreams with. What I didn't tell her was that I planned to invite her to live with me once I found my home in Santa Fe. I didn't dare express this idea to her yet. I knew that she needed confirmation that there was actually a place to go. I was now highly motivated to find this place.

Don't Worry, Be Happy

Back in Berlin I said my adieus to Mark Pierre and Jing, who decided to linger in the city before returning to Bonn. I had the less-than-magnificent bus trip to Hanover to look forward to the next day. Christmas was fast approaching and I had only a few

days remaining in Germany before flying to New York and then on to Toronto for my first family Christmas in five years. Throughout my time in Europe, and especially during December, I had spontaneously burst into my own rendition of *White Christmas*. Bing Crosby would be turning in his grave. The snow in Moscow had given me fleeting hope but the return to Germany came replete with a gray and green landscape as opposed to the pure white magnificence I dreamt of.

As I hugged Mark Pierre and Jing, the familiar feelings of regret that accompany many farewells arose. I love moving on but saying goodbye to dear friends carries its own bittersweet sensation.

“Auf wiedersehen, John,” called Marc Pierre, as I climbed on board the bus. “Keep listening for that song, *Don’t Worry, Be Happy*.”

“I will, my friend. But there’s not much time left,” I called back as the bus pulled smoothly away.

In Hanover, Marc Pierre’s step father and mother helped me to find a ride to Frankfurt using Germany’s version of pre-arranged hitchhiking. All went well. A car would be leaving late the next morning.

The following day, I climbed into the front passenger seat beside the driver, a man in his thirties. There were two young women in the back seat, also paying for their rides. Introductions were made and then the driver asked if we minded if he played some music. We three nodded in agreement, so he slipped a cassette into the stereo. A song I had never heard before blared in surround sound through all four speakers.

“*Don’t worry, be happy.*”

I sat back contentedly, absorbing the music. When the track finished I explained to the driver, Dirk, how I had been waiting for nearly six weeks to hear this song. He played it again.

My last night in Germany was spent with Gottlieb and his family in a lovely apartment in the heart of Frankfurt. Gottlieb was yet another friend I had met in India. He was a biking enthusiast and asked me if I would like to join him on a tandem bicycle for a tour of the downtown area. I put all my clothes on (I had left Marc Pierre’s woolen jumper with his mother in Hanover)

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for what turned out to be a blazing circuit through the heart of Frankfurt's business district. I pedaled hard and leaned into the corners, following Gottlieb's lead. In a pub, we reminisced over our time together in India.

Early the next morning I caught the efficient underground to the airport and checked in for my flight. After clearing customs and immigration I sat down to wait and amused myself by watching people, a favorite airport pastime. With less than a half hour until departure the last passengers arrived. To my complete surprise, this little grouping included Dirk, my driver from the previous day. I waved and he smiled and walked over to me.

"You didn't tell me you were flying out today," I uttered.

"I am going to see my brother in New York City for Christmas. He has been living there for a few years," he responded pleasantly. Without another word he sat down on the spare seat beside me and rummaged around in his carry-on for something. He put headphones over my ears, pushed the play button on his walkman and I listened to *Don't Worry, Be Happy* until we were called for boarding. This was to be a Christmas Eve I would never forget.

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White Christmas

Ontario, December, 1988.

My parents were at the airport in Toronto to pick me up. They had driven all the way from Florida so the whole family could be together for Christmas. They had left their fifth-wheel caravan at a park near Tallahassee before making the long drive north to Canada. As we left Toronto on the familiar 401 highway heading west to my sister Cathy's house I noticed, somewhat disappointed, that there wasn't even a hint of snow on the ground. I burst into what was by now a plaintive version of *White Christmas*. My thoughts hearkened back to the last time we had all been together at Christmas. It was 1983, and only a few days later my parents accompanied me to the Pearson International Airport, the place we were leaving now. There, dressed smartly in Harris Tweed blazer and tie, I was bumped up to first class on an overfull Swiss Air flight to Zurich. From there I headed on to Saudi Arabia for the beginning of what, unbeknownst to us all at the time, was to be a five year overseas saga. Now I was returning, having gone full circle. I was dressed more shabbily in my somewhat exhausted New Zealand-purchased raincoat and black, baggy Afghan trousers. But I was richer now, with what seemed like a lifetime of experiences compressed into five years. I was definitely not the same wet-behind-the-ears young manager who had departed his homeland in December 1983. I now practiced yoga and meditation daily, and once a week I had a silent day of fasting. I was curious as to how my parents would

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respond to these new routines when I accompanied them in their truck and fifth-wheel trailer from Florida to New Mexico.

By coincidence, dare I call it that, my parents were headed on a cross-country tour of exploration themselves. They were seeking a winter home somewhere in the southern states of America. We spoke of this as we drove to Cambridge. They said they would be happy if I accompanied them as far as New Mexico. It would be an excellent opportunity for us to get to know each other again after all these years.

We sat around a crackling fire at Cathy and her husband Bill's house on Christmas Eve. A pine tree was decorated with shiny spheres, lights and tinsel. Beverly and her husband Andrew joined us. I felt very comfortable in this familiar setting.

The next morning it snowed. Bing Crosby's soul could rest easy. I would not be singing his song for a long time.

Mom, Dad and I drove their truck down the familiar route from Detroit on the interstate through Ohio and into the Appalachians of West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. We reminisced about the time we were making the reverse journey after a visit to Florida with Nana when I was a teenager.

In the rolling country of Tennessee the fuel light indicates the tank is nearly empty. Dad pulls off at the next exit and drives a few miles from the interstate in order to find a service station. We know we are in the heart of hillbilly country when the attendant, a young man, can't understand us, or we him. His twangy dialect goes way beyond that of the Clampetts on the popular television program The Beverly Hillbillies. We end up resorting to sign language and pointing to indicate that we want a full tank of fuel. After paying and stretching our legs we all return to the car. We see, to our astonishment, a contraption that looks remarkably like the Clampetts' car in the aforementioned TV series. There is raised exposed seating behind the driver's seat. The entire vehicle has been roughly modified.

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We met no obvious hillbillies on this trip and, after one overnight stop, we arrived at the park near Lake City where Mom and Dad had left their trailer. Hitching the trailer to the truck, we headed west and soon left the eerie she-oak dominated forests of the Tallahassee region. This was new territory for us all, this panhandle of Florida that is bounded by the Gulf of Mexico to the south, and by Georgia and Alabama to the north. This, the humid south of America, like the rest of this vast country, is a land of contrasts. We were astonished by the frequency of the military bases in Florida, and by the relative poverty of Mississippi. Mom and Dad had all the time in the world, and I was in no hurry, so we lolled along, lingering longer in parks that caught our fancy. We walked Gulf beaches, and used fold-up bicycles (unfolded of course!) to get around at times.

Unfortunately, one of my weekly silent days corresponded with an informal walking tour of New Orleans. Dad's patience was severely tried as I responded with gestures and in writing as we wandered around the French quarter of this fascinating city built on the Mississippi delta.

As we left the Gulf coast by Galveston in Texas and headed inland to Houston we also left the balmy and humid gulf climate behind. While stopped at a caravan park in the city of San Antonio, I went for an exploratory walk around the neighboring residential and commercial area. Eventually I wandered into a large, open shop with high ceilings. I'm guessing that it had been a warehouse in a previous incarnation. Candles and incense soon gave way to books and countless items related to black magic. I had never been in a store like it, nor have I since. One could imagine witches and sorcerers standing in San Antonio's suburban backyards, stirring cauldrons over open fires and sending curses to their neighbors. The place gave me the creeps and I left quickly.

It felt great to have this leisurely time with Mom and Dad walking, talking, driving and sharing meals together; getting reacquainted after my five overseas years. They shared with me their aspirations of spending winters somewhere in America's warm south. I brought them up to date on my dream of living a self-sufficient lifestyle, and how all the signs were pointing me to Santa Fe. While not expressing it in words, my parents displayed their reservations over all this talk of coincidences and guidance.

But, as always, they accepted my eccentricities, and they listened patiently, if somewhat skeptically, to my stories. Each day I rose before dawn to do a yoga routine in the hallway of the trailer. Mom and Dad stepped carefully to get past me as they went outside for an early walk. By this time it would be getting light, and I would be sitting in meditation, diligently continuing the Kirtan Kriya I began in Amsterdam with Lucia. At this time I was repeating this meditation later each day, as well.

Eventually our restful journey brought us to Carlsbad Caverns National Park in southern New Mexico, a spot that had impressed me during a winter break vacation while at university. The three of us joined other visitors on a two mile subterranean walk from the main cave mouth; eventually reaching an awesome underground chamber that was fully 1800 feet long, 255 feet high and over 800 feet below the surface. It was humbling to imagine the amount of rock that separated us from our usual above ground world. This massive sub-surface limestone cathedral was decorated with colorful clusters of stalactites and stalagmites, created by the slow, persistent dripping of water and soluble minerals over an extended period of time. Nature is in no hurry. When captured in the light of torches these natural, dolomite adornments were every bit as impressive as the huge stained glass creations of human artisans in the famous cathedrals found on the Earth's surface. This ostentatious gallery wrought by the patience and persistence of nature evoked an awe rivaling that of any man-made cathedral, St. Peter's Basilica included.

The national park covered seventy-three square miles and the next day Dad and I decided to join a ranger-led 'wild cave tour' in another part of this vast protected area. We had a great time exploring a lesser known, but nonetheless impressive cave. There is something special about being with a small group of people deep under the Earth's surface, especially when all the lights are out and you sit in total mute darkness. Nothing could be seen, nothing at all, as no surface light penetrated to these deeper subterranean caverns. The silence was nearly absolute save for the faint, muffled dripping in some distant antechamber and the soft breathing of our companions and us.

We enjoyed exploring the arid landscape above ground and the unique and extensive cave-like visitor's center. One day was spent

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in Carlsbad Township, procuring supplies, and visiting the Living Desert State Park, a zoo and botanical garden exhibiting the wildlife of the Chihuahuan Desert. Here I saw my first rattlesnakes, safely displayed in thick glass terrariums. Mom and I laughed openly at the antics of the prairie dogs, large rodents living in communal warrens. Delightfully, they would sit upright on their haunches, surveying their little empires. The females were in heat, and the boys scrapped incessantly, intent on enlarging their harems. We were all savoring these last days together, knowing I would soon be heading north to Santa Fe to meet my destiny. My parents planned to continue their explorations west to Arizona and California, eventually meeting up with my Aunt Rhoda, who was flying down from Ontario to meet them.

Dreams Come True

Ultimately, the day of reckoning could be avoided no longer. I jammed my clothes and sleeping bag into my backpack, and after a warm farewell from Mom, Dad drove me beyond the northern boundary of the park, to an appropriate place to hitchhike. Off to an early start I hoped to reach Santa Fe by nightfall. It was cool but my way was lit by the winter sun; and if this day proved to be anything like the others we had experienced since entering this southern New Mexico desert landscape, this winter sun, unhindered by humidity, would soon provide ample warmth.

I had never hitchhiked in America before, and I was curious what the day would bring. I didn't have to wait long to find out. An old car pulled over, guided by an even older man. This white-haired octogenarian rolled down the window and cheerily asked, "Where ya headed?"

"North to Santa Fe," I replied.

"I won't git ya that far but I can shau take ya a bit furtha north."

I was soon enjoying the inspiring tales of this enthusiastic, sprightly chap who had lost his wife a few years back and had a new girlfriend (I use the term loosely) in the next town.

"We're takin' it slowly," he said. "No point in rushing these things. I'm headin' up to her place to take her to the weekly dance. We both love dancin'."

He dropped me off in the middle of the next town, his parting words being, "It's never too late for love."

What a great way to start the day, I thought as I set off, pack on back, for the northern edge of town where I hoped to get my next lift. On the way a police car pulled over and the local sheriff asked me what I was doing. It seemed he hadn't seen many hitchhikers in his town before. I gave him a brief, respectful version of my plans. There was no point in antagonizing this man.

In a gruff manner he said, "You git a move on. We don't like no loiterers in this here town."

I didn't quite know how a neatly dressed man walking briskly with a huge pack on his back resembled a loiterer. Perhaps he just didn't trust strangers. After all, according to persistent rumors, in 1947, at a spot in the desert outside Roswell, the next town to the north, a UFO crashed, and the dead bodies of aliens were seen by observers before both the crash debris and the dead bodies were whisked off to Roswell Army Airfield. Some people still insist that the military engaged in a cover-up of this event. Roswell has built a burgeoning tourist industry around this alleged UFO crash. It was my intention to go through Roswell since my map indicated a paved road led from there directly to Santa Fe.

When hitchhiking the best of intentions are often superseded by unforeseen circumstances. One short ride later I found myself in the elevated passenger seat of a modern super truck heading west away from Roswell, rather than north as I had planned. We traversed rolling snow-covered forested country. The driver explained that he usually traveled with his wife, but on this trip he had left her at home in Georgia. This huge truck I was sitting in was his personal rig and he was proud of it. Uniquely air painted on the outside and very comfortably appointed within, complete with double bed, it was like a home away from home. I had seen many of these monstrous trucks with air spoilers on the roof during my month with Mom and Dad. These vehicles were ubiquitous mobile residents of the interstate highways that crisscrossed North America. The giant supermarkets and department stores that served a convenience-oriented public were no longer

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built on railway lines. Cargo carrying trucks had largely displaced freight trains and this trend was likely to continue as cities sprawled outwards with growth, and climate-controlled indoor shopping malls continued to be built in the suburbs, where most people lived, worked and shopped.

Such urban reflections were far from my mind as we rolled down through the pine forests to the dry red landscape that is my forever memory of New Mexico. We joined Interstate 25 and turned north.

“I’ll have to drop you off in Albuquerque since I’ll be heading west from there. It’s only an hour’s drive from Albuquerque to Santa Fe,” my friendly truck driver told me.

I was thankful as I sat high and dry and warm in my panoramic seat. I was enjoying the driver’s trucking stories as much as I was the desert scenery. Albuquerque is the largest city in New Mexico, and it was through this Spanish-style city that I had passed so many years before on the previously mentioned university trip to the Grand Canyon.

I now found myself standing on an entrance ramp to the same Interstate 25 we had been navigating the past two hours. It is illegal to hitchhike on interstate highways, so I would have to try my luck on the entrance ramp. It was late afternoon. Being only a few weeks after the winter solstice, night would arrive shortly. At 5000 feet elevation, it would soon be cold so I would need a ride right away if I was to reach Santa Fe before dark. As the truck driver had informed me it was Super Bowl Sunday, and I knew that many Americans, especially the male variety, would be glued to television sets watching the final, culminating game of the American Professional gridiron football season.

It is usually difficult to hitchhike in a city and I was reminded of this as car after car passed me. Finally a young man in a pickup truck stopped. I tossed my pack into the open back of the truck and climbed into the passenger seat. Judging by the alcohol vapors that permeated the cab and the swerving manner in which my host drove, not to mention the heap of empty beer cans at my feet, I didn’t need the benefit of a breathalyzer test unit to see that this loud talking young man, on his way from a Super Bowl party, shouldn’t be driving. I felt decidedly uncomfortable, and it was

with relief when we pulled over a few exits further, still within the city.

I said thanks, closed the door, and was about to retrieve my pack when I heard the engine rev up. I reached frantically for my back pack, only just getting hold of it as this inebriated driver sped off. Shaken by this close call, and seeing that hitching in the, by now, nearly total darkness was futile, I checked into a nearby budget hotel.

Lying in bed that night, I couldn't help but wonder what I had got myself into. I had traveled halfway around the world in pursuit of a vague dream of living self sufficiently in harmony with nature. The seed of this dream had germinated in Papua New Guinea a year and a half before, and a seeming series of coincidences in the Himalayas had brought me to this nondescript chain hotel room, identical to countless others. What was I doing here? Was this journey real or was this all some fantasy produced by an over imaginative mind? It had all seemed so easy while traveling in the comfortable company of my mother and father. I was on my own again now, and I had very nearly lost the few possessions I carried a couple of hours before. I had been so sure of this trip until now. I had written Bill Reed, the man I had met briefly in Nepal, at his rural Santa Fe address. I had posted the letter in Amsterdam before my Moscow trip, and I had given Cathy's home in Ontario as a return address. I had been disappointed not to have heard back from Bill, but in the excitement of Christmas and our family's reunion I hadn't given this setback much thought. Where else could I go? I had no other contacts in New Mexico. I knew that I wanted to share my life with Lucia, but where would we do this? I wouldn't dare ask her to join me until I had found that which I was seeking. How would I find it and what exactly was I seeking? The doubts and questions went on until, half asleep, I experienced that familiar presence and felt, rather than heard, the words, "Have trust. Tomorrow's another day." The last concerns melted away like snow under the onslaught of a persistent rain. It didn't matter if I found that which I sought in Santa Fe. It was the journey that was most important. Every destination, every stop, was temporary, whether for weeks or a lifetime. The journey, lived well, was eternal. I fell into a deep and dreamless sleep, with the realization that I was at the

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culmination of a pilgrimage. This was an odyssey of faith, and there was no turning back now.

The next morning was frosty, but the sun was gleaming and the sky was a vivid cobalt blue. As I walked through the hotel parking lot, I decided to look more closely at the bright yellow New Mexico license plate on a parked car I was passing. I had been impressed with these plates, so much sunnier than their drab cousins used in most states and provinces. I came away even more impressed. On the license plate, in addition to the state name, were the words, *Land of Enchantment*, the exact title of Deuter's tape I had heard in the restaurant in McLeod Ganj so many months before. The song on that tape that had 'enchanted' me was called 'Santa Fe'. Today was to be the day when I would come face to face with this place that had so captivated me and called me from afar. I knew Santa Fe was the New Mexico state capital, the highest state capital at 7,000 feet, and the oldest European city in America. I had heard, also, that many artists and healers called Santa Fe home now, though many of these people were drawn there from disparate parts of America and beyond.

But what was it really like? What of its heart? Would I feel comfortable there?

In contrast to my unsettling experience of the evening before, I got a lift almost immediately, with a traveling salesman on his way to a sporting goods store in Santa Fe. Our route on the interstate roughly paralleled the legendary Rio Grande which, frankly, didn't look so grand; more a large stream than a river. The dark rocky Sandia Peaks loomed over Albuquerque to the east. As we reached the extremity of these mountains we swung round ever more north-easterly towards Santa Fe. I was impressed with the scenery. Who wouldn't be? We drove across a broad plateau, curiously crisscrossed with ravines. The wooded Jemez Mountains provided a protective backdrop to our left and, after half an hour's drive, we began to make out the snow clad Sangre de Christo (Blood of Christ) peaks in the distance. I had read that these rugged mountains represented the extreme southern tip of the Rockies. It was a majestic panorama. This was sometimes called 'Big Sky Country' and the term was fitting. Everything was big. The Earth, mostly unclothed of vegetation, lay naked, exposed, colorful and raw under the luminescent desert light. The

sky clear, save for a smattering of white cirrus above the mountains, seemed to go on forever. I was beginning to understand the allure of this wild and expansive environment, its enormity serving to embolden and stimulate the spirit; to dream and to fly. This felt like a place where dreams came true, where anything was possible.

With some trepidation, I borrowed the phone at the sporting goods store in downtown Santa Fe. Surrounded by the trappings of the outdoor life—hiking boots, skis, and colorful all-weather clothing, I dialed the number of the only contact I had. Would Bill still live here? Would he be away on another trip? If he was here would he feel compelled to help me?

After two rings the phone was answered and I immediately recognized the deep and resonant timbre of Bill Reed's voice.

"Hi Bill. This is John Haines. We met a year ago in Nepal," I began.

"Oh. I was wondering when I would hear from you. You hadn't responded to my letter."

"Your letter? What letter, Bill?"

"I wrote to your sister in response to the letter you sent me from Amsterdam."

"When did you write?" I asked.

"Just before Christmas," he answered.

Now I understood. "It must have arrived at Cathy's after I left. Canada's postal service is notoriously slow during the Christmas period," I explained.

"Do you need a place to stay?" Bill asked.

"Yes."

"You can sleep here if you don't mind stretching out on the floor. Have you got a sleeping bag?"

"Yes."

"That's settled then. My girlfriend, Susan, is a lawyer in town. I'll give her a ring and she can bring you out here when she finishes work. It's a 35 to 40 minute drive from Santa Fe. I only come into town about once a week."

"That would be great, Bill."

He went on to describe where Susan's office was relative to my location.

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"There's a health shop you'll pass on the way. You can leave your pack at Susan's office, and look around town a bit. If you like, I'll call Susan now. I'll see you later. Oh, by the way, John, you mentioned in your letter that you were looking for a place where you could live self-sufficiently. My property might suit your needs. I have photovoltaic panels for electricity and I have a productive little garden that could be enlarged."

My heart nearly skipped a beat.

"I thought you loved your place, Bill. Do you want to move?"

"I've had the place for sale on and off for years. I would consider moving into Santa Fe."

"We'll talk more about this later, Bill. See you." I hung up.

That, by now, familiar and almost eerie feeling that I was being guided swept over me. How did this work? What power seemed to carry me to this improbable destination?

I walked to Susan's office, following the Santa Fe River part of the way. This river's source was obviously the mountains looming over the city. The river was a tributary of the Rio Grande and, like the watercourse it fed, it was little more than a stream. Most of the buildings I walked past were constructed to at least look like adobe in various earth shades. Even a large parking garage across from the impressive St Frances Cathedral, was actually a mud and viga structure. Vigas were whole peeled logs laid horizontally to form roofs and act as beams in ceilings. The homogeneity of construction and style gave a charm and a continuity so sadly lacking in most North American cities. The buildings didn't all look the same. Working with adobe meant that curves were possible. Doors were unique forms of creative expression. Lintels and window frames were often painted in vivid shades of turquoise and violet, making distinctive South West accents to the sombre earth shades of the walls.

Susan was in her office when I arrived. With brown, straight hair cut to medium length and parted immaculately in the middle, she was a friendly, no-nonsense sort of person, every bit the efficient lawyer. She agreed that I could leave my bag in a corner of her office. I would return there late in the afternoon. I went out to do some exploring. Despite the 7,000 feet of elevation the sun felt warm enough for me to shed my jacket. The health shop was the best I had ever seen, with a huge selection of organic foods

and products available. I was amazed at the number of art galleries in town. When I remarked on this to one gallery owner she told me there were almost 250 galleries in this city of sixty thousand people, and that in a good year more art was sold in Santa Fe than any place else on earth after Paris, London, and New York. This sounded like empty braggadocio, but judging by the number of shops, and by the prices, this statement could have some basis in fact.

Susan drove me out of town on Cerrillos Road and here I noted that even this quirky city had fallen prey to that scourge of every city I knew in North America, the fast food strip. It was late afternoon. Wisps of low horizontal cloud were tinted by the softly setting winter sun. During the half hour drive into the country we were treated to a constantly changing kaleidoscope of colors that intensified from pastel pinks and oranges to a vivid cerise, more garish than the lipstick of a vaudeville dancer. The last part of the drive was over an unsealed gravel road.

"What's that set of buildings on the left?" I asked, curious about what appeared to be a deserted town. Shop fronts looked like the ones I had seen in Western films.

"That's a movie set," explained Susan. "One of three in the area. Films and TV series have been made there, even commercials from time to time. This land is the old Eaves Ranch. J.W. Eaves, the owner, originally from Texas, has had it subdivided into large sections of a minimum of five acres, I believe. So it will never be very crowded out here."

It certainly wasn't crowded now. We passed only two houses on the drive of several kilometers before we turned into a rutted lane and stopped at a gate. I opened and then closed the gate as Susan drove through. I stood there, momentarily observing the undulating bare earth and rock, covered with scattered and stunted evergreen trees and Prickly Pear and Chola cacti. A few isolated islands of snow hid in shady nooks under trees. The color of the clouds had faded to purple, mauve and silver floating over a horizon of baby blue. It was magic. There was a slight indefinite buzzing in my head, a sound I had not heard before, yet familiar nonetheless. Something inside of me knew that I had arrived at the place where I next would live.

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I got back in the car and relaxed into my seat, saying nothing. Susan drove on.

"Bill sold this first piece of land, which is ten acres, to his real estate agent's brother. It includes that windmill and well," pointed out Susan. A tall windmill sat on a galvanized metal stand on the only level bit of land I'd seen along the driveway.

"There is a fence around that opening in the ground on the left, Susan. Why is that?" I asked.

"This is old mining property. There are shafts and adits all over this land, and on the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) property bordering on the right. That is a particularly deep shaft. The fence is there to keep wandering people and cattle from falling in." Susan drove on and passed through another gate.

The tiny wooden house sat on another flattish piece of ground surrounded by low hills. Bill greeted us at the door.

"Good to see you, John. Welcome to my humble abode."

"Thanks Bill," I said, as I shook his hand.

"Would you like a tour? It won't take long," he said, grinning.

The front door opened onto a small open area with a floor made up of loose bricks set on their sides directly on the ground. There were built-in cupboards on the left and a bathtub with shower on the right. I found this to be a unique sort of foyer. I once read that what one sees at the entrance is something the residents of the house will be busy with. I wondered how often Bill took a bath.

We continued into the small square kitchen, also with an unmortared brick floor.

"I built this all by myself," said Bill proudly, gesturing with upturned hand around the house. There was something of the rough, handmade look to everything, matching perfectly the man who had built it. Bill flicked a toggle switch set in the wall and a tiny light flashed on over an opening between the kitchen and the table in the next room. He flicked the switch the other way and the light shone brighter.

"Our electricity is generated by solar panels outside. I'll show you those in the daylight tomorrow. Power is stored in large batteries. This lamp is a 12 volt tail light for a car. The brighter setting of the bulb is the brake light component of the same bulb."

Bill stepped down into the next room. I could see that the floors were following the gentle slope of the ground outside.

"This is my stereo," said Bill, pointing to a car cassette player set in the wall. "I can use the car radio because it is designed to run off 12 volts. My computer and television are hooked to a wire running from an inverter that changes the 12 volt DC (direct current) to 110 volts AC (alternating current), just like the electricity available in your average home."

This was new to me. Near the end of my time in Canada, before heading off to Saudi Arabia, I had visited an owner-built house in the country as part of my work with the telephone company. The house was passively solar designed with most of the windows facing south to the winter sun. The house had been literally built into the hillside. I recalled that that house had its own electrical supply and battery room, where the telephone cable entered.

The living area was warmed by a pot belly wood stove.

"Bill likes it hot," explained Susan as she and I discarded our outer winter clothing. Bill was wearing a T shirt.

"Yes, Susan's right," added Bill. "And it's easy to keep a little house like this warm." There were floor-to-ceiling windows across the whole south side of this room. There were no curtains. The desert, illuminated by the rising full moon, came right up to the windows.

"The sun coming through those windows heats up the bricks on the floor and they serve as passive holders and transmitters of heat during the non-daylight hours," Bill went on.

I looked at the back wall, which was made up of horizontal logs chinked with concrete.

Bill saw me looking there. "That's the front of the log cabin I first built," said Bill. "Those logs are old telephone poles that were lying on the ground nearby."

We walked through a door and were suddenly standing in a cozy cabin. The brick of the floor had been mortared and sealed with some sort of resin. A built-in double bed covered the far wall. The windows here, as in the living room, had no curtains. There was no one around to look inside. There was a strong sense of being connected with the outdoors.

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I stayed in the house for a week, sleeping on the living room floor. I loved the nights, waking from time to time to watch through the windowed south wall the procession of the stars and the passing of the moon. The presence of the moon was immense, like a huge luminescent ball traversing the sky.

I continued with my yoga and meditation practices, even in the evenings when Bill was watching television. Bill and I discussed the possibility of me purchasing the house and land, which amounted to twenty acres of rolling scrub-covered desert pockmarked with mine shafts and adits. I thought back to my grandfather on my mother's side who had passed away when I was fifteen. I had felt his presence and his guidance periodically since his passing, particularly these last years of travel. He had been a miner in Northern Ontario and I still had, packed away, a collection of rocks built upon the bits of gold, peacock copper ore and pitchblende (raw uranium) he had given me in my childhood. My mother's teenage years had been played out on abandoned gold mining property outside South Porcupine in Ontario's isolated far north. My grandfather was the caretaker for that property when a mine-related illness no longer allowed him to spend time underground.

I had a strong sense that my grandfather had played a significant part in bringing me to this bleak but beautiful property, a place that Bill claimed was the most highly mineralized place in North America. Lead, copper, silver and even gold had been mined here from the 1800s until the 1950s.

Susan would talk to me when Bill wasn't around. "Don't get your hopes up about buying this property. Bill loves this place. He has had a number of offers over the years. Each time he backs out in the end, unable to sell it. Did you know that after roughing it in the cabin for a while he built the kitchen which, as you can see, is separate from the cabin? He didn't have the heart to cut a Piñon tree that grew where the table is in the living area now.

"He lived that way for a few years until he tired of trudging through the elements between the cabin and the kitchen. He finally cut that tree and built the living room as you see it today."

I continued to meditate often and constantly received confirmation that this was where I was meant to live. I moved into town and stayed with Gary, a friend of Bill's. Gary also happened

to be the real estate agent responsible for the sale of Bill's land. I entered into negotiations with Bill. Susan acted as solicitor.

Bill did sell that property to me. We agreed on a closing date of late March. That would give me time to purchase a vehicle and return to Canada to get my possessions out of storage, where they had been for five years. I would also need to arrange to sell my two rental properties in order to pay for this new place, mortgage free. I wrote to Lucia and asked her to join me. She called before I left Santa Fe and said she would come, but not until the beginning of August when she had completed her yoga teacher training course. My heart leapt. Dreams do come true. I was over the moon with anticipation and decided to make one last visit to Bill and my house-to-be before making my way to Canada.

"Bill. Do you know the name of that pyramid-shaped hill?" I asked. The house lay in a landscape that was nothing but hills. One dominated the others and it was to this symmetrical lump of rock that I referred.

"Oh. Did I not tell you before? That is Turquoise Mountain. The Anasazi mined Turquoise from it before they inexplicably disappeared roughly 900 years ago."

"Who were the Anasazi, Bill?"

"Nobody knows for sure. The name Anasazi means 'ancient ones' and was given to them by other indigenous people who later migrated to the South West. The Anasazi originally inhabited some of the cliff dwellings in the area. The piece de la resistance was their village near the Four Corners called Chaco Canyon. If you ever get a chance, visit it."

Four Corners is the only place in America where four states meet at a single point. These states are New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado.

"Is there still Turquoise found around here?" I asked, persistent with curiosity.

"Yes. After the Anasazi disappeared other Native Americans mined the mountain for Turquoise. It is a sacred stone in all the original cultures here. You've seen the market in Santa Fe. Turquoise is used in traditional jewelry and crafts. The color is still used on houses today and in South West art. It's an iconic

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component, almost a trademark of the South West. Go for a walk around here. You'll find bits of Turquoise lying on the ground."

I touched the piece of Turquoise Lucia had given me back in McLeod Ganj, a stone she said was sacred to the Tibetans. Here I was, about to embark on an adventure in the wilderness at the base of Turquoise Mountain. Another thread of synchronicity had been woven in a garment that transcended space and time.

Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.

Confucius

John P. Haines

Epilogue

The Musings of a Wanderer

There is a universal language called love that transcends gender, race, age, religion, beliefs and nationality.

Perhaps love's greatest expression is kindness to a stranger, and its simplest expression is a smile.

The beauty of a smile is not at all dependent on the quality of one's teeth.

Strangers are friends I haven't yet met.

I have to listen to my dreams before I can follow them and when I follow my dreams the whole universe conspires to assist me and I am guided by coincidences.

There are no coincidences.

The gods, or the forces, or the beings that orchestrate serendipitous happenings, have a bizarre sense of humor.

What we are looking for finds us when we are looking the other way.

Love is the source and the glue that holds this world together.

The journey is more important than the destination.

There is a power far greater than the largest bomb ever built by man. There is a love warmer than the sun. This love and power are contained in a space smaller than the smallest seed, and have created this entire manifest world for fun. We should enjoy it because God is watching in a front row seat using our eyes as opera glasses.

John P. Haines

I could have read of these lessons in books but I have needed to experience them to ground them into my being. That which we learn intellectually is knowledge. That which we absorb through experience is knowing, or realization. It is 'knowing' that led me half way around the world to Santa Fe; a knowing which arises in a pure heart. We don't all need to travel the world to find something that is waiting inside all along. I hope I've saved you the plane fare. The ultimate trip is free.

Great Teachers, or Messengers, have come at various times and to various regions to guide humanity. The essence of each of their messages is the same, although each of them has a particular focus which is embodied in the words and attributes of that teacher. Each has taught the Golden Rule, for instance.

Just as I have seen that the news events of the world are often distorted in the reporting of them, the messages of the world's prophets have been distorted by those who have come after, who modify the message to suit their *personal* needs, who step down the Truth. These are the ones who continue to spread the belief in the importance of outward force, violence and war.

It is time for all of humanity to recognize the rights of all members of the race to seek truth in their own way, whether through a religion or teacher of their choice, through a personal search for the Self, through adherence to high moral standards, or through Nature. After all, ultimately it is the message, not the messenger, which is important. We must each seek in our hearts that which unites, rather than separates us.

*It is in the exchanging the gifts of the earth that you shall find
abundance and be satisfied.*

*Yet unless the exchange be in love and kindly justice it will but
lead some to greed and others to hunger.*

Kahlil Gibran

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How different these words from *The Prophet* are to the attitudes of so many affluent people today, 'If I can afford it, why shouldn't I have it?' Others, who can't afford it, crave it. Buddha would say that all this desire creates suffering. It isn't just the greedy person who suffers; our planet, our home, suffers as a result of our greed.

I saw first-hand in my travels how destructive our ways can be in acquiring the objects of our fancy.

Who are we to be self-righteous and arrogant? Some Christians may look at Muslims and say that Islam is holding women in bondage. I say that *men* are enslaving women, not a religion. It has always been thus.

Behind our doors is there not shame as well? Are we not all equally culpable? Are we not all unwitting accomplices in a colonization that continues unabated to this day? The form may have changed and perhaps the name. Today our global economy separates us from the resources we use for the creation of goods that we crave; cravings fuelled by advertising and greed and by our blind belief in a great lie, 'If enough is enough, then more is better.' Could today's paradigm be called the colonization of consumption? We in the West sit smugly surrounded by an opulence of comfort, oblivious of the destructive nature of our desires. In our global economy the source of the raw materials and the working conditions of Third World factories are destructive to the Earth and harmful to the dignity of human beings. Perhaps if we let go of the desire for more and become content with what is, our deepest wishes will be fulfilled, even before we are aware of them. Life is. It gives us exactly what we need when we need it.

Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

John P. Haines

Are we not contributing to the wholesale rape of indigenous cultures, their spiritual beliefs, and the lands in which they live? Are we not pillaging our own home, Mother Earth, without whom we cannot even physically exist?

This too shall pass. The road to recovery and healing is known and available to be walked whenever we wish. Each of us must find our singular path that joins with and adds support to our collective road. As we grow in awareness of our own unique dreams and put into practice their vision we flow like a stream and join our brothers and sisters in a powerful river that feeds an ocean of wisdom, responsibility and joy.

In the awareness of the Awakened Being is the realization that we are all cells in the body of humanity; we are all truly interconnected. Everyone deserves our love. Each of us is a perfect creation of the Divine, either extending love or asking for it. Our job is to see the Presence of Love that is at the underlying core of everyone we meet.

I believe this is a time on our planet to take action. Many of the ancients sat in caves and gave us marvelous scriptures and prescriptions for leading peaceful lives. But today is a time to get involved. Was not Jesus an activist when he overturned the tables of the money lenders? Was not Mohammed an activist when he fought to unite the previously warring tribes of Arabia? Did not Krishna urge Arjuna to carry forth his destined warrior activities with the impersonal wisdom so poetically entreated in the Bhagavad-Gita? Can not their followers unite to fulfill a common wish for peace that resides in the heart of every human being?

When our family, while living in Kerikeri in the Far North of New Zealand, was visited by a peace walker, he had but three days to complete a walk to the northern tip of the country, a journey that had begun months earlier at Bluff, the southernmost tip of the South Island. This man's shoes were in tatters and held together with electrical tape. His feet were split and blistered. Every step must have sent a surge of pain through his body. We asked him, "Haven't you done enough? Do you really need to push so hard to reach your goal?"

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He replied, "If whole armies can stay up night after night without sleep and put every ounce of their energy into destruction, surely I can pull out all stops and accept a little pain in the interests of peace."

This most determined and focused of men accomplished his goal. When a woman we knew dropped him off with her car so that he could catch a bus to Auckland and his subsequent international flight connection, a peace symbol, fully half a meter across, appeared on the roadside where he had been standing. She had been watching him closely and he hadn't drawn it. Who had?

I'm asking you to join this great renaissance of humanity and contribute to the awakening of this planet. There are not more than six billion souls incarnated on Earth at this time for nothing. It is time for us, for the little people of this world, to recognize our power, our brilliance, and our ability to affect change. As individuals, we have been like lone stunted rata trees eking out a fragile existence on the windswept sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands. These trees have been like islands on islands, attracting other flora and fauna to the shade and protection they afford. Eventually they have joined together in one connected mass of strength and diversity.

We individual humans are ready to do the same. Acting collectively we can harness the strength of our numbers and our diversity and become an irresistible force for change. All each of us has to do is find our own unique part in the Divine Plan. All each of us has to do is follow the coincidences that guide us along the path of our destiny. Then we are part of the collective awakening of humanity and of Planet Earth.

The following words came to me in the middle of the night in 2003 during a time in which I was recording a few songs of peace while living in the Netherlands. You are welcome to copy and distribute *United We Sing* provided you acknowledge the source.

John P. Haines

United we sing.

*And our voices are heard in the decision halls of the world,
And the intention of our song is felt,
As we the little people of the world see, finally, we do make a
difference.*

*The physical violence stops and weapons are no longer made
As our governments follow Costa Rica's example
And no longer create armies of destruction.
Defense departments are replaced with peace departments.
And their efforts turn to worthy causes so that all of the world's
people have enough to eat and have clean, comfortable shelter,
and a safe place to live.*

*And we begin the reconstruction of our natural world
That has been so sadly abused and neglected.
We now have armies of children of all ages planting trees
And the deserts bloom.*

*As our voices resound around the world our hearts give a
collective sigh of relief
And peace descends upon us.*

*And our children's children will speak of this time with wonder:
The time when the killing stopped;
The time when the meek inherited the Earth
United in song.*

Peace in ourselves, in our families, in our schools and communities, in our countries and in the world is not just a dream, it is inevitable.

John Haines

New Zealand

Appendix

Gunung Merapi is one of Java's most dangerous volcanoes, having erupted countless times over the ages. A blast in November 1994 killed 69 people. Eruptions in July and October 1998 forced thousands to evacuate their homes. The 'mountain of fire' continues to rumble and spew lava down its flank. The once popular climb from Kaliurang to the crater that I have described is now off-limits; but it is possible to climb to a viewpoint below the tree line to see the lava flows. One must accompany an experienced guide and, I believe, Christian Awuy is still one such guide (Refers to pages 52 and 53).

Some 50,000 people live along the Ok Tedi and Fly river system. Sediment and tailings from the Ok Tedi copper and gold mine have reduced the amount of fish in the Ok Tedi and Middle Fly rivers by 80%. The tailings are composed of fine-grained rock containing traces of copper sulfide and residual cyanide. Changes to the riverbed have increased flow rates in the river, producing dangerous rapids—a major hazard for locals whose principal form of transport is the canoe. The thick mud that blankets the river banks in many places has destroyed traditional gardens. This mud also makes it difficult for villagers to get down to the river to collect drinking water, bathe and fish. Tailings have caused a rise in the river bed, flooding and the smothering and dieback of at least 1,300 square kilometers of forest. Landowners sued BHP (Broken Hill Properties of Australia), the majority stakeholder in the mine, leading to a 1996 out-of-court settlement in which BHP agreed to pay AU\$126.4 million in compensation. In 2001, BHP ended its involvement with the mine, transferring its 52 per cent stake to a company partly representing landowners in the isolated Western Province of Papua New Guinea. A spokesperson for BHP said the company believed that the agreement protected it from liabilities arising from the future operation of the mine (Refers to pages 113 to 116).

MSF ('Medecins sans Frontieres' or 'Doctors without Borders') decided to pull out of Afghanistan in 2004 when the objectives and actions of the Afghan coalition, the Pentagon and the British Government blurred distinctions between military personnel and humanitarian aid workers. Local people became confused, and targeted and killed three European and two Afghan MSF staff in June, 2004, an unprecedented attack in MSF's thirty year history of working in violent conflicts. This brought the total deaths of aid workers to thirty in one-and-a-half years, triggering MSF's pullout. Thousands of people were left without healthcare and many foreign and local aid staff lost their jobs (Refers to page 152).

About the author

John Haines was born in Niagara Falls, Ontario. He now lives with his family in New Zealand's lightly populated and stunning subtropical Far North. His simple life includes the growing of an abundance of organic vegetables and fruit and assisting his wife in the homeschooling of their two daughters. He broadcasts a popular weekly one hour radio interview program that is simultaneously carried on local cable television. He's lived in The Netherlands (twice), Saudi Arabia, Australia, New Mexico and Arizona, together with his first 25 years in Ontario, Canada. He met his beautiful Dutch wife Lucia in India during an 11 month period in the Himalayas. He holds Bachelor of Commerce and MBA degrees, and is a qualified teacher of the Power of Sound and Touch for Health.

John Haines is an entertaining and inspiring speaker. He facilitates workshops or what he calls *playshops* in voice, communication, nutrition and motivation. To arrange for speaking and/or *playshop* opportunities in your area contact John by email at johnhaines@xtra.co.nz or peacejourney@hotmail.com. *Playshops* can be created to suit the needs of your group.

The almost unbelievable chain of coincidences described in this book led John around the world to Santa Fe, New Mexico. His profound experiences and experiments with Truth, simplicity, self-sufficiency and the Spirit of Nature in New Mexico, Arizona and beyond are the subject of the upcoming sequel to *In Search of Simplicity*.

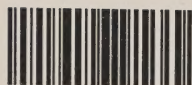
To see more about John's work view:

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/johnhainesinsearchofsimplicity>

For additional information and ordering details for *In Search of Simplicity* see:

<http://www.insearchofsimplicity.com>



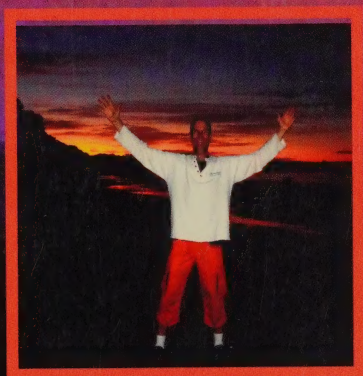


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